

A.Reznikov

# The Comintern and the East

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Strategy  
and Tactics  
in the National  
liberation movement

Introduction by Professor  
R. A. Ulyanovsky, general editor



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Translated from the Russian by *James Riordan*  
Designed by *Vladimir Yeryomin*

**Александр Резников**

**КОМИНТЕРН И ВОСТОК**

**Стратегия и тактика  
в национально-освободительном движении**

*На английском языке*

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## CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . .	5
Chapter 1	
REVOLUTIONARY PROLETARIAT AND LIBERATION MOVE- MENT . . . . .	29
1. Imperialism, Socialist Revolution and the National-Colonial Question . . . . .	29
2. Development of the Theory of the National-Colonial Question after October 1917. Lenin's Fight Against Revisionist Views at the Second Comintern Congress . . . . .	51
3. Lenin's Ideas and the Comintern . . . . .	87
Chapter 2	
COMINTERN AND EASTERN SECTIONS . . . . .	104
1. Comintern and the Communist Party of Indonesia . . . . .	104
2. Comintern and the Communist Party of India . . . . .	129
3. Comintern and the Communist Party of Indochina . . . . .	161
4. Comintern and the Communist Party of the Philippines . . . . .	181
5. Comintern and the Communist Party of China (in the 1925-1927 National Revolution) . . . . .	205
6. Comintern and Some Questions of the Communist and National Liberation Movement in the Arab East and Africa . . . . .	229
Chapter 3	
COMINTERN CONGRESSES: FURTHER ELABORATION OF CARDINAL PROBLEMS OF EASTERN POLICY . . . . .	237
Conclusion . . . . .	287



## INTRODUCTION

Some ninety years have passed since Lenin first spoke on the national-colonial issue.<sup>1</sup> These have been years steeped in revolutions, wars and coups. How many eminent politicians who had proclaimed the eternity of capitalist civilisation have seen their stars wax and wane in that time? How many famous names of people claiming to be theorists and apologists for white minority rule in Africa and Asia have been cast into oblivion? History dispensed swiftly with outmoded and devalued ideas. But Lenin's theoretical heritage has become no literary monument; we still read and reread him, finding ideas that are as fresh as ever, as amazingly relevant and topical as if they had been penned in the 1980s; we come to Lenin as to a contemporary thinker.

The secret of the vitality of Lenin's ideas lies in a combination of his being faithful to Marxist scientific method and being able to apply it creatively to changing conditions. More firmly and profoundly than all his contemporaries Lenin provided a Marxist analysis of the new historical age of imperialism and socialist revolution. Despite all the twists and turns that have taken place, we are still living in that age, the age of Lenin. Hence the utter efficacy of all the fundamental tenets of Leninist thought.

Karl Marx had not known imperialism. The historic merit of exposing its economic, social and political essence, and conditions and capabilities engendered by imperialism for revolutionary activity belongs to Lenin. All new that was brought by Lenin to the theory and practice of Marxism in one way or another goes back to his solution of this fundamental task,

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<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "On the So-Called Market Question", *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Vol. 1, 1977, pp. 75-125.



titanic in its complexity. National relations are an aspect of Lenin's approach to analysing imperialism. In looking at the imperialist epoch from the viewpoint of the new content which imperialism had introduced into national relations, Lenin wrote in the article "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", "Imperialism means the progressively mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of Great Powers; it means a period of wars between the latter to extend and consolidate the oppression of nations; it means a period in which the masses of the people are deceived by hypocritical social-patriots."<sup>1</sup>

The antagonistic contradiction between ruling and oppressed nations that had existed from the outset of capitalism's colonial policy became a really new international problem in the imperialist epoch.

Lenin consistently held to Marxist revolutionary traditions on the national question: "It is ... impossible to fight for the socialist international revolution against imperialism unless the right of nations to self-determination is recognised."<sup>2</sup> He drew the conclusion that "national wars waged by colonies and semi-colonies in the imperialist era are not only probable but inevitable".<sup>3</sup>

Lenin formulated a new approach to the national and national-colonial question in the context of socialist revolution. He demolished the notions of classically pure types of social revolution, realising that both socialist and bourgeois social revolutions that were "classically pure" in their objectives, forms, motive forces and direct *raison d'être* were just not possible in the imperialist epoch owing to the intensification of all class, political and national contradictions, owing to the increasing unevenness in capitalist development and the awakening of the colonies and semi-colonies. That was particularly valid the farther east one went, for this was a world where capitalism rubbed shoulders with feudalism and patriarchal relations and, in some places, had not yet managed seriously to dislodge them. Lenin created a theory of revolutions for the imperialist age that shattered the apparently hitherto immutable sequence of bourgeois and socialist stages of the revolutionary process.

Imperialism extended the world capitalist market to include the whole world and thereby made it in a certain sense unified.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, 1977, p. 409.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Socialism and War", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Junius Pamphlet", *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 1964, p. 310.

It brought into being a monstrous combination of developed capitalism and extreme and deliberately cultivated backwardness that seemed unthinkable in terms of the ideals of the bourgeois system.

By subordinating archaic social structures to itself, making them part of the world capitalist organism and combining various forms of exploitation, imperialism thus created conditions for the spread of the revolutionary conflagration and the growth in the scope of the destructive and creative work of revolution. It was this possibility of the revolutionary conflagration spreading, and of revolution under imperialism switching from one object to another, in so far as this meant resistance to a system embracing and sanctioning all imaginable forms of oppression, that Lenin had foreseen. That broke with the dogmatic patterns of socialist and bourgeois revolutions.

Sober political assessment of the problem and adherence to democratic principles binding upon a Marxist enabled Lenin to proclaim the right of nations to self-determination up to and including secession and formation of an independent state, as applied to both the oppressed nationalities of tsarist Russia and the colonies of other imperialist countries.

He was the first Marxist to look towards the colonial world as a cause of revolutionary upheaval of the whole capitalist system and as a paramount factor in revolutionary strategy during the imperialist epoch. In those burgeoning national movements Lenin saw immense revolutionary potential that exceeded the bounds of the East and had world significance. He was the first in Marxist and socio-political thought generally to note that the peoples of the East were no longer passive objects of capitalist influence, they were on the move as an independent and, moreover, revolutionary force which would more and more affect the destinies of Europe and the whole world. On that basis he drew conclusions for strategic struggle against imperialism and for socialism. He stressed that, "the times when the cause of democracy and socialism was associated only with Europe alone have gone for ever".<sup>1</sup> And further, "a new source of great world storms opened up in Asia... It is in this era of storms and their 'repercussions' in Europe that we are now living."<sup>2</sup> Lenin's great innovation was in perceiving the relationship

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "On the Slogan for a United States of Europe", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx", *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, 1973, p. 584.



between the non-socialist, bourgeois-democratic, nationalist movements within the dependencies and the struggle against both imperialism and capitalism, as well as the destiny of the socialist revolution; he assessed them as a major component of the world revolutionary process.

Lenin perceptively saw in the national liberation movements a powerful force for revolutionary struggle precisely against capitalism and an objective ally of socialist revolution and the revolutionary working class in the advanced capitalist countries. That was a new powerful source of revolutionary vigour, the honour of discovering which belongs to Lenin. It had not and could not have existed in the era of pre-monopoly capitalism, and was therefore unknown to Marx and Engels. A more natural view of the course of development at that time was a victorious proletarian revolution in the metropolitan countries leading to the liberation of the colonies (although in some cases, as, for example, in India, liberation by their own forces through a national uprising was not excluded).

The Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia demonstrated the veracity of that approach to the national question. Subsequently, however, the delay in socialist revolution in the West led to a situation where various forms of "national uprising" really did become the major means of resolving the question. And their extension in breadth and depth led to a reverse effect of the anti-colonial struggle on the fight against capitalism itself, turned the colonial world into a second front, as it were, of the fight against capitalism, and opened up fresh avenues for undermining it and bringing it down.

Lenin attributed exceptional importance to this new battlefield. At the Second Comintern Congress in 1920 he said that, "world imperialism shall fall when the revolutionary onslaught of the exploited and oppressed workers in each country ... merges with the revolutionary onslaught of hundreds of millions of people who have hitherto stood beyond the pale of history, and have been regarded merely as the object of history."<sup>1</sup> And at the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East in 1919 he underlined the idea, uttering the words which now serve as the guideline for anyone who studies the idea of non-capitalist development for Asian and African nations: "The socialist revolution will not be solely, or chiefly, a struggle of the revolutionary proletarians in each country against their

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Second Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, 1974, p. 232.

bourgeoisie—no, it will be a struggle of all the imperialist-oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries, against international imperialism."<sup>1</sup>

Hence the great Leninist idea of internationalism, i. e., of an alliance of the revolutionary working class of the advanced countries with the peoples oppressed by imperialism. He was referring to an alliance between the European working class and the revolutionary, though not necessarily proletarian—and in their overwhelming majority by no means proletarian—people of the colonies and dependencies. This was a point he particularly made at the Second Comintern Congress: "...We see taking place a union between revolutionary proletarians of the capitalist, advanced countries, and the revolutionary masses of those countries where there is no or hardly any proletariat, i. e., the oppressed masses of colonial, Eastern countries."<sup>2</sup>

Lenin advanced the grand internationalist notion of getting together with the oppressed peoples even before the October 1917 Revolution in Russia. After the Bolsheviks had come to power it took on a new dimension: the policy of an alliance with anti-colonial movements began to take shape on both a party and a government basis, and that made it especially effective and necessary for fighters within the colonies. Lenin insisted that "a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest alliance, with Soviet Russia, of all the national and colonial liberation movements. The form of this alliance should be determined by the degree of development of the communist movement in the proletariat of each country, or of the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement of the workers and peasants in backward countries."

As a world phenomenon, imperialism brought East-West oppositions into unity, uniting bourgeois progress and medieval backwardness, the exploiter and the exploited nations. In taking account of this reality, Lenin drew the novel conclusion that a united front of struggle against imperialism could exist in East and West, linking up the national anti-colonial actions with

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, November 22, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, 1977, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Second Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 232.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 146.



the working-class struggle in developed states against imperialism; he thereby elaborated a new strategy for the communist movement.

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Lenin's idea of various forms of alliance with national liberation movements depending on their nature presupposes a class differentiated attitude to anti-colonial actions and to the nationalism of oppressed nations. Lenin's ideas on that subject retain all their relevance today when the scope of anti-imperialist struggle in the colonies and dependencies has grown considerably owing to the emergence of fresh revolutionary possibilities at the culminating stage of colonialist and imperialist disintegration.

Above all Lenin warned against a nihilist attitude to nationalism that arose on an anti-colonialist basis, and against leftist attempts to rule it out or put it down as some reactionary force; that showed disregard for the historical laws of its emergence and development. He advised taking account of anti-imperialist nationalism, learning how to support it, cooperate with it and find some sort of approach to it; at the same time he saw its historical and class limitation and ultimate hostility to communism. He told delegates to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East in 1919: "You will have to base yourselves on the bourgeois nationalism which is awakening, and must awaken, among those peoples, and which has its historical justification."<sup>1</sup> Over sixty years have gone by since that was said, yet Lenin's words are as topical as ever, particularly so against the background of pseudo-revolutionary phrase-mongering, and encourage a critical attitude to those who would choose to skip law-governed stages of historical development.

Referring to the oppressed nations where capitalism had not yet taken root, Lenin saw a "historical justification" for bourgeois nationalism in the fact that "*objectively*, these nations still have general national tasks to accomplish, namely, *democratic* tasks, the tasks of *overthrowing foreign oppression*"<sup>2</sup>. Several decades on enriched by fresh historical experience, we can with assurance say that these general national tasks are not exhausted by the attainment of political independence and declarations of sovereignty, they involve consistently overcoming the influence of imperialism in international politics, within the national economy, culture,

people's minds, etc. That is what Lenin had in mind by "overthrowing foreign oppression". Tyranny of imperialist powers did not mean, and certainly does not mean now at a time of neocolonialism, merely denial of the right of nations to self-determination, although that is its most outrageous manifestation. Therefore, the anti-imperialist potential of the national movement, from the point of view of resolving the general national tasks, lives on for some time after independent statehood is attained, although, naturally, class differentiation and the class opposition grow more and more within the national liberation movement.

Lenin wrote in the article "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" that "the bourgeois nationalism of *any* oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed *against* oppression, and it is this content that we *unconditionally* support".<sup>1</sup> Lenin's attitude to the nationalism of an oppressed nation takes account of the internal heterogeneity of any form of nationalism, the presence within it of both general democratic and nationally narrow content corresponding to the requirements of exploiters. He means support not for abstract nationalism in general, but only for its anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist and anti-racist aspects, i.e., for the general democratic programme of nationalism. Lenin was ready, moreover, to back these aspects in any liberation activity against imperialism, even if it took the form of religious protest. He noted in this connection that "political protests in religious guise are common to all nations at a certain stage of their development".<sup>2</sup>

The message sent by the Soviet government to the Afghan Amanullah Khan in May 1919 and the subsequent establishment of friendly relations with Afghanistan testified to the readiness to make an alliance even with feudal groups motivated by anti-imperialist, patriotic feelings under a religious banner in countries where more advanced anti-imperialist forces had not taken shape. When a wider spectrum of such forces did exist, it was the duty of socialists, according to Lenin, to "render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic movements for national liberation ... and assist their uprising—or revolutionary war, in the event of one—*against* the imperialist powers that oppress them".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, 1977, p. 412.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "A Draft Programme of our Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, 1977, p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, pp. 151-52.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, 1974, p. 59.



Lenin's specific historical approach to evaluating the role of nationalism and his notion of the heterogeneity of anti-colonial movements and nationalism of oppressed nations, and of orientation towards the most revolutionary elements are certainly valid today. Reference to the Leninist heritage can help us avoid a one-sided attitude to nationalism. In his article "A Liberal's Outspoken Pronouncements" (July 1914), whose authorship was established for certain in 1970, Lenin wrote, "We Marxists are fully aware that, apart from reactionary nationalists, there are liberal nationalists (or national-liberals—such are the Octobrists and the Cadets), and even national-democrats."<sup>1</sup> This was said in relation to Russia, to the nationalism of the ruling nation. But there is no doubt that democratic elements are manifest more fully and deeply in the nationalism of an oppressed nation. Lenin's definition of types of nationalism is based on the class position of its proponents.

Lenin took the same class-criteria approach to the national movements in the East: "Everywhere in Asia a mighty democratic movement is growing, spreading and gaining in strength. The bourgeoisie there is *as yet* siding with the people against reaction."<sup>2</sup> That was the basis of Lenin's approach to bourgeois nationalism. He believed that the chief representative, or the chief social bulwark, of this Asian bourgeoisie that is still capable of supporting a historically progressive cause, is the peasant."<sup>3</sup> But in the article "Regenerated China" written in 1912, he said that, "China's freedom was won by an alliance of peasant democrats and the liberal bourgeoisie. Whether the peasants, who are not led by a proletarian party, will be able to retain their democratic positions *against* the liberals, who are only waiting for an opportunity to shift to the right, will be seen in the near future."<sup>4</sup> That was to his mind the issue on which hinged the fate of the Chinese revolution. That is the question on which hinges the fate of the contemporary national liberation movement and which arises time and again with every new political twist in the countries of Asia and Africa: can the peasants, in the absence or

weakness of a working class and communist party, safeguard their revolutionary position or will their revolutionary spirit quickly die down and they will permit the liberal, national-reformist bourgeoisie to usurp political power?

Every time we see in Asia and Africa today a turn from revolutionary goals to national reformism, from socialist orientation and militant anti-colonialism to capitalism and an understanding with the imperialist powers, we can confidently assume that the working people have been unable to safeguard their revolutionary position against the bourgeoisie. Is that not what happened in Egypt? Under Nasser Egypt was a vanguard of struggle against colonialism—with the agrarian reform, nationalisation of big Egyptian capital, elimination of foreign capital, and proclamation of the principles of scientific socialism; and then under Sadat it became a country which saw the return to unrestricted development and encouragement of private enterprise, to an "open door" policy to foreign capital, the betrayal of socialist ideals and the national interests of Arabs, and to an alliance with American imperialism and Zionism. The anti-imperialist nationalism of Nasser gave way to the reactionary, pro-imperialist nationalism of Sadat. And that happened because of an utter loss of vigilance on the part of the Egyptian anti-imperialist democrats, who did not see the emergence and swift development of the social stratum of bureaucratic, particularly military-bureaucratic bourgeoisie, the *nouveau riche* of the petty bourgeoisie, the solid phalanx of wealthy farmers, and the sabotage of officialdom. A party guided by scientific socialism and capable of leading the peasant masses never took shape in Egypt. The inability of Nasser and his close associates to form a mass democratic and effective political force that could keep the country on its chosen progressive path also played its part.

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Lenin regarded the peasant problem as decisive in defining development for the colonies. Most people in the East, he said, are "not workers who have passed through the school of capitalist factories, but typical representatives of the working and exploited peasant masses who are victims of medieval oppression".<sup>1</sup> Further he said, "In this respect you are con-

<sup>1</sup> *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, No. 4, 1970, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Backward Europe and Advanced Asia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, 1977, pp. 99-100.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Democracy and Narodism in China", *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 401.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East. November 22, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 161.



fronted with a task which has not previously confronted the Communists of the world: relying upon the general theory and practice of communism, you must adapt yourselves to specific conditions such as do not exist in the European countries; you must be able to apply that theory and practice to conditions in which the bulk of the population are peasants, and in which the task is to wage a struggle against medieval survivals and not against capitalism."<sup>1</sup>

That presented particular demands to the communist movement in the East. It was a question of "translating" Marxism into the language of backward countries, of "adapting" communist parties (their composition and special tasks) to the level of the peasant countries of the colonial East. In Lenin's view, the peasants had to be the focus of attention of revolutionaries and Communists in the colonies. He made the point that one could not pursue communist tactics and a communist policy in backward countries "without establishing definite relations with the peasant movement and without giving it effective support."<sup>2</sup> Lenin urged particular caution in regard to the peasants, special attention to vestiges of national sentiments in countries and among nationalities with the longest record of oppression.<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen, Lenin regarded the Eastern peasant as the principal vehicle of democratic nationalism and set him the task of preserving his revolutionary position to counter the collusive policy of the bourgeoisie; he believed in the possibility of the rural worker ultimately arriving at socialism. But he certainly never idealised the peasants, or made a fetish of their backwardness in the hope that it would make the peasants assimilate socialism more easily. As he put it, "...The more backward the country, the stronger is the hold of small-scale agricultural production, patriarchalism and isolation, which inevitably lend particular strength and tenacity to the deepest of petty-bourgeois prejudices, i.e., to national egoism and national narrow-mindedness."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Second Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 241-42.

<sup>3</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 151; "To the Comrades Communists of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Daghestan, and the Mountaineer Republic", Vol. 32, 1975, p. 317.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 150.

Such was the dialectic of Lenin's train of thought. While noting the existence of democratic peasant nationalism, he straightaway revealed the inherent danger of national selfishness and limitation. That is a lesson for today. No matter how positively we may assess the influence of anti-imperialist nationalism from the standpoint of building up an independent state, a national economy, a state sector and national culture, we are bound to see that elements have long crystallised within it that want to halt the liberating revolution, its further progress and consistent revolutionary forces, and take up a position hostile to socialism. Such phenomena and processes may be found virtually in every present-day national liberation movement.

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In present circumstances there is an abundance of types of nationalism in the former colonial world. Without claiming to provide an exhaustive classification, excluding overlapping strata and symbioses, we may distinguish the following: the anti-imperialist nationalism of patriotic sections of the national bourgeoisie; the nationalism of the new compradore mediatory bourgeoisie; the nationalism of the military and bureaucratic bourgeoisie; the bourgeois nationalism that is blatantly chauvinist and great-power in orientation; the nationalism of feudal and semi-feudal elements advocating independence, which has some resemblance to bourgeois nationalism.

Finally, the most developed and widespread nationalism is peasant, petty-bourgeois, i.e. national-democratic, which has considerable anti-imperialist potential. National democracy expresses the interests of broad sections of non-proletarian working people, above all the peasants and urban petty-bourgeois strata. Although their stance is affected by the duality of the petty bourgeoisie, national democracy on the whole, especially its left, revolutionary-democratic wing oriented towards socialism, occupies anti-imperialist positions.

The abnormal and sometimes even awesome phenomenon of nationalism as a product of the degeneration and decline of individual sections of the communist movement into anti-communism and anti-Sovietism under the guise of Marxism is quite another business. Lenin himself had to deal with the degeneration of leaders of the Second International. It led to the conversion of social-democracy into social-reformism, to a split in the workers movement, to the shift of once



revolutionary parties to counter-revolutionary positions. Nowadays we can see new and even more distorted forms of transition to nationalist positions.

There is, however, a multitude of forms and varieties of that nationalism which Lenin called historically justified. It arises in areas where imperialism still holds sway, economically or politically, and where racism and neocolonialism are in existence. Nationalism there should be judged primarily by its democratic and anti-imperialist potential, by its strength, spread, and support it enjoys among the masses. The non-aligned movement and the campaign for a new economic order in the world represent the most active and effective forms of that democratic, anti-imperialist nationalism in which millions of people oppressed by international imperialism are taking part.

It is an objective phenomenon, a natural stage in the development of ex-colonies and dependencies, the overwhelming power in most newly-liberated countries at the present time. It is precisely to prise apart the mass of the working people, the peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie, who make up the powerful reserve and reliable support of the revolutionary movement, from the most advanced and consistently anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist trends, that bourgeois propaganda and reactionary, chauvinist groups instil into people the idea that concerted action between proponents of Marxism-Leninism and democratic anti-imperialist nationalism must be avoided at all costs. This is a major ploy in the strategy of anti-communism in the developing countries; to combat it one has to remember Lenin's instructions that one should display a maximum of circumspection, tact and goodwill in regard to national and religious traditions, be able to single out in the nationalism of oppressed nations the general democratic content and use it against alien political and economic oppression, counterposing it to chauvinism.

Lenin's idea of the duality of nationalism is as topical today as it ever was. In real political affairs Marxists-Leninists aspire clearly to see the various nuances of nationalism determined by social, ethnic, religious and regional conditions of their manifestation. The most important thing is to take account of the two trends in nationalism, the progressive and the reactionary, to follow the tactical line of giving support to the first trend in the overall struggle against imperialism and exposing the latter as pro-imperialist, neocolonialist and chauvinist and campaign uncompromisingly against it.

We spoke above of the forms of manifestation of nationalism because of its social nature, its two major tendencies. What a rich palette of regional, political and ideological colours contemporary nationalism has when we look at it from a subjective political point of view. There has been in the last ten years alone the above-mentioned pro-imperialist compradore nationalism of Sadat; the nationalism of the Arabian oil states which have shown a certain ability to defend national interests against imperialism and to resist US-Israeli-Egyptian collusion; the chauvinistic nationalism of Tshombe, filled with his personal megalomania and designed to mask the obvious bankruptcy of his home and foreign policy; the similarly impotent grotesque nationalism of the Central African emperor-for-a-day Bokassa; the braggart, and no less harmful than the two above instances, nationalism of Idi Amin in Uganda who resorted to the cult of outright violence to shore up his regime, and yet who was on occasion capable of anti-imperialist attacks; beside the above three, there is the moderate anti-imperialist nationalism of Julius Nyerere, striving to come closer to the principles of internationalism and rendering assistance to the peoples fighting in the south of Africa.

Finally, the most important phenomenon today is the revolutionary potential of national democrats standing in the vanguard of the fight of many peoples of Asia and Africa against imperialism and moving towards a rapprochement with scientific socialism. Out of their ranks have come revolutionary-democratic organisations that are steadily casting off petty-bourgeois nationalism and adopting internationalism and scientific socialism; they are therefore rightly becoming the vanguard parties of their people, leading them onto the path of building socialist society. These are merely a few examples of the contradictory manifestation of nationalism today.

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Let us take the example of the Iranian revolution. Of course, at root this revolution is truly popular, political and to a lesser extent social. It has taken place under the slogans of restoring the ancient principles of Islam, affirming justice and equality as understood by Islam, under the direction of Shiite clergy, but it acquired a genuinely popular, anti-monarchist and anti-imperialist character, causing one of the greatest revolutionary shocks in the Middle East in recent decades,



aimed against the Shah's rule and U.S. imperialism that had backed it. It so happened that the repositories of clerical wisdom, and they number about 300,000 men, came to lead the people: what circumstances caused such a fierce revolutionary potential of militant-religious nationalism under the banner of Islam?

Iran had long been an intricate knot of political and social problems, where acute discontent with foreign imperialist domination was mixed with the ever-mounting internal social contradictions, popular protest against the ruling feudal and bourgeois clique acting in glove with foreign capital in both the economy and the politics. In the early 1950s this dissatisfaction overflowed into a broad popular movement for the nationalisation of foreign oil companies which actually brought down the Pahlavi dynasty. Only U.S. intervention made it possible to destroy the fruits of that revolution, carry out a government coup in August 1953 and return to the throne the Shah who had fled from the people's wrath. The most energetic military, political, financial and economic expansion of the USA, the flooding of the country with some 50,000 U.S. experts, particularly of the military and intelligence services, and the mobilisation of internal reactionary forces enabled the Shah's regime to enjoy some temporary stability. Its life was extended for another twenty-five years.

From the outside Mohammed Riza's regime seemed to be flourishing. Oil sales enabled him to spend colossal sums on maintaining armed forces and the police, to siphon off billions of dollars into his private bank account and to set up a privileged guard. Capitalist productive forces grew. Even certain social changes took place, the so-called white revolution designed gradually to eliminate the vestiges of feudalism in the countryside and pave the way for capitalist development. The country became a military and political outpost of the USA against the USSR, as well as within the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea area. The Shah took upon himself the policing functions of defence of neighbouring reactionary regimes and of armed confrontation vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, which all promoted the interests of imperialism and his own aspiration to hegemony. Behind the imposing façade of the Shah's regime, however, there were increasingly mounting and unresolvable contradictions. Rapid capitalist accumulation impoverished a large number of artisans and peasants, driving millions from the countryside. The cities became overcrowded with the wretched, while the mediatory bourgeoisie, officials

and *nouveau riche* prospered; corruption became a nationwide vice.

The extensive attraction of foreign capital accompanying the "white revolution", particularly as a vehicle of advanced technology, led to the emergence of a new cause for complaint. The national bourgeoisie and its hangers-on began to sense their unequal and subordinate status in relation to foreign capital for which the Shah's regime had established the most advantageous conditions, seeing its own support there.

The Shah responded to the increasing popular protests and discontent with intensified reprisals, a further tightening of the screw and refinement of the military-police apparatus. The country was at the mercy of the Shah's secret police, SAWAK, which hunted down all opponents of the regime and treated them mercilessly. Thousands and even tens of thousands of people, especially democrats and Communists, languished in prison and were subjected to torture and even execution. In March 1975, the Shah slapped a ban on all political parties and decreed the formation of the so-called Iran National Resurgence Party.

Having relied on the armed forces, punitive agencies and foreign aid in his attempt to modernise Iranian society at the point of the bayonet and by up-to-date technology, the Shah tried to eradicate national customs and traditions. He was encouraged in this by the fact that the leaders of the prevailing religious community, the Shiites, accounting for 90 per cent of the population, had never recognised the Pahlavi dynasty, regarding the Shah as a usurper who had seized power in 1921 and subsequently held on to it by violence and fraud. The Shah, being so cocksure in his reliance on the privileged military staff, on plundered wealth, on universal corruption and the cruelty of his punitive agencies, even made no attempt to normalise relations with members of the Shiite Muslim religion that enjoyed enormous influence over the people; he endeavoured to dislodge Islamic Iranian nationalism by preaching vigorously the grandeur of pre-Islamic Iran. In 1976 he replaced the Muslim calendar and introduced a new system of chronology starting with the Persian King Cyrus (558-529 BC) who had founded the Achaemenid dynasty. He also introduced other measures objectively designed to undermine Islamic traditions, the role and influence of the Shiite clergy.

An exceptional historic situation was forming in Iran.



The Shah and his entourage were unable to use Muslim religion and the major part of the Shiite clergy as an instrument in shoring up the despotic regime. They were scared of the mullahs, not daring to attack them openly and use those vicious reprisals which they had employed against the regime's secular opponents. The half-measures to which the Shah resorted to extinguish Shiite traditions only fanned up the contention between the clergy and the Shah's regime.

Many Shiite mullahs were from the common people, sons of poor artisans, street traders, peasants, low-grade officials, teachers and merchants who had managed to save up a little money to receive a religious education. They lived among the people, knew their needs and difficulties, shared the social aspirations of simple Iranians, their dreams of equality and justice. These motives were echoed in their sermons in the mosques. Against the background of vicious police terror, when hundreds and thousands of progressives from among the workers, intellectuals and even democratic army officers had been thrown in gaol or executed, when any overt political struggle was outlawed, and when activists of the Iranian People's Party (Tudeh Party) who had avoided execution had languished in prison for decades, the Muslim religion (Shiism) became the only possible form of anti-Shah opposition, a certain autonomous political force, anti-imperialist and anti-despotic in its orientation, reflecting the attitudes of the widest sections of the people towards the Shah's regime.

In Europe, during the Reformation, at the frontier between the Middle Ages and modern times, popular anti-feudal movements had definite religious colouring. Europe has long left that time behind. But in no Eastern country can the liberation struggle even today get by without religious slogans. And in Iran the Shiite clergy not only initiated the movement, they became its organising force.

In the summer and autumn of 1978, a new serious wave of strikes, demonstrations and mass protests demanding the monarch be deposed swept Iran. He ordered his army into action against the people, but the days of his dynasty were numbered; on 16 January 1979 he fled from Teheran.

Ayatolla Khomeini played an outstanding part in the Iranian revolution. The aged Muslim theologian was able, on the one hand, to be the standard bearer and, on the other, to unite into a single national front the most diverse, sometimes mutually opposed social elements—the middle bourgeoisie, the urban petty bourgeoisie, artisans and small traders, large

parts of the factory proletariat, the students, peasantry, who together comprised an absolute majority of the country's population; and all of that had come together on a revolutionary, anti-monarchist and anti-American basis in the form of a universal religious protest, spilling over into an open and all-embracing revolution.

Khomeini's policy was to show no irresolution in fighting to bring down the Shah and put an end to his police regime. At the same time, he was able to find a unique, thoroughly Islamic traditional and therefore accessible form to express the aspirations of the oppressed classes for social change, an end to plunder of the people by foreigners, large landowners and capitalists, for raising living standards of the common people and asserting their dignity. He expressed all these radical demands in the form of a revival of Islamic values. The utopian nature of Islam's social slogans is evident; for nearly one and a half thousand years of Islamic history its social appeals and slogans, like those of all other religions, had ultimately served as a means of reconciling the people to grim reality, objectively masking the usurious, feudal and then capitalist exploitation.

The political countenance of Islam in Iran is exceedingly contradictory. Islam's conservative leaders oppose socialism, believing it to be just as harmful to Iran as imperialism. This finds its expression in the general slogan which the Islamic ideologists preach: "Neither West, nor East!" In such circumstances, the consistently revolutionary forces of Iran cannot be assured that revolutionary gains are guaranteed and irreversible, or rely on the initial successes, especially as in its first few years the Iranian revolution, having carried through a radical political coup, has slowed down its further development, digging in when confronted by the need for social transformation, by the task of decisively raising the social and economic level of people's lives, particularly that of the working class and the peasants. No substantial change has occurred in the position of these classes.

Two streams and trends have emerged in the Iranian revolution, that once united the whole people in overthrowing the Shah's regime: a radical popular, and a liberal bourgeois. Working people of town and country, industrial workers, peasants, intellectuals, and petty bourgeoisie are calling for the decisive and complete destruction of military-police despotism and dependence on imperialism, for the consistent democratisation of the social and political system, for social and



economic change, for a better living standard of workers and peasants. Big capital and bourgeois sections of the population aspire for a prime place at the table of government and equal relations with international capital. They are content to be rid of the excesses of the autocratic Shah and definitely favour a bourgeois constitutional regime, better relations with foreign capital and the largest imperialist powers of the West, primarily the United States. They are interested not merely in preserving the capitalist system, but also in cooperating with imperialism in political and military areas on the new terms, in so far as they see in that a guarantee of retaining their privileges. In the first case we are talking about development of the revolution and promoting its popular traditions, about left-wing democratic forces taking part in running the country, about the steady progress of political revolution through several intermediate stages into social revolution. In the second case, we are talking about the revolution being curtailed, its popular social character waning. The first trend was aimed at strengthening anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, anti-monopoly and anti-capitalist tendencies; the second means isolating genuinely revolutionary forces from power, using Iranian nationalism for building an alliance with the West.

Both trends were united at the moment of overthrowing the Shah and the intensifying of conflicts with the USA, and the liberals had to take a back seat, since they realised that they depended on the common people in obtaining their restricted, class-selfish objectives, that the revolution was developing precisely owing to the radical campaign. Radical slogans were then foremost and became the banner of revolution, as it were. But attainment of the initial goals inevitably led to an intensification of internal contradictions, to a differentiation of the joint anti-Shah front, to a regrouping of forces. Bourgeois liberals, scared by the popular threat and crisis of the private capitalist national economy, were increasingly inclined for a "normalisation" of relations with the West, for activation of anti-communist sentiments, for using nationalist and religious prejudices for these ends, drawing Ayatollah Khomeini and part of his close followers to their side.

A powerful force, largely aroused and moved to action by the preaching of Islamic revival, however, is taking part in the fight for progressive development of the Iranian revolution, against the attempts of religious anti-imperialist nationalism to reverse the movement. Being nationalist in its

ideology and leadership, the Iranian revolution has been popular in its forms. What is more, despite its obvious restricted, overwhelmingly petty-bourgeois nationalistic character, the Iranian revolution has demonstrated the use of mass revolutionary methods of struggle.

It was noted at the 26th CPSU Congress that "the revolution in Iran, which was a major event on the international scene in recent years, is of a specific nature. However complex and contradictory, it is essentially an anti-imperialist revolution, though reaction at home and abroad is seeking to change this feature".<sup>1</sup>

In the next phase of the Iranian revolution, attempts to revive the Islamic ethical norms which had been destroyed in the preceding stage of capitalist development resulted in the aid to small and medium merchants and businessmen in their search for profits and in the camouflage of the same capitalist road of development with paternalistic charity moves in a spirit of Islam's egalitarian principles. Two to three years after the Iranian revolution's victory over the Shah, the clergy who directed it led Iran into specific Islamic religious despotism controlling all spheres of life.

The Shiite clergy of Iran became the country's supreme authority, turned the government into religious despotism and used its power to dampen the revolutionary energy and anti-imperialist sentiments of the masses. This was being done against the background of persecution of all opposition forces—the Mudjaheddins, the Fedayeens, the Tudeh Party and the Kurdish national revolutionaries—and of imposing on all social strata political and ethical norms geared mostly to the interests of the clergy. A tendency has emerged: the deeper the Islamic principles and ethical norms penetrated society, the more aggravated the crisis of the popular, anti-imperialist, democratic revolution became. A deadly threat has faced the revolutionary forces.

The Islamic authorities have launched a massive offensive against progressive, Left democratic forces who express the interests of the Iranian working people better than anyone else. The target of harsh repression is the People's Party of Iran (the Tudeh Party), the vanguard of the Iranian working people, of the Iranian working class, which had long fought against the despotic regime of the Shah, for freeing the country from dependence on

<sup>1</sup> Documents and Resolutions. The 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1981, p. 18.



imperialism, for radical social and economic reforms in the interests of the popular masses.

It is an open secret that the People's Party of Iran is persecuted not for the "crimes" the Islamic authorities ascribe to it. Right-wingers disguised as Islamic activists refuse to accept the fact that the Tudeh upheld truly popular interests. As a result, the political revolution has failed to become a social one. The dispossessed have remained dispossessed, the rich have remained rich. Such is the complexity of contemporary nationalism.

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Lenin recommended Communists to support democratic anti-imperialist movements; he saw that as their unequivocal duty. But he warned against even embryonic forms of socialist awareness being absorbed by nationalism, against socialism dissolving in it, losing one's own personality, losing sight of the temporary and limited nature of alliance with democratic nationalism. He saw the guarantee against this happening in the communist movement retaining its own ideological and organisational independence and purity. At the Second Comintern Congress he put forward the notion that the working class should fight in "a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form".<sup>1</sup> And that remains valid even though the communist movement in backward semi-feudal or pre-capitalist societies has overcome and continues to overcome immense difficulties. In 1920 Lenin said that proletarian parties, "if indeed they can emerge in them", would only be able to pursue communist tactics and policy if they did all they could to support the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist peasant movement.<sup>2</sup> So we see that the very possibility of creating proletarian parties in Eastern countries at that time seemed fairly problematical to Lenin.

Those difficulties have still not been overcome. Formation of mass proletarian parties and organisations is objectively hindered by the scarcity of the working class and its political inexperience, bearing in mind that normally a large part of hired labour comprises workers of the first or second generation

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "The Second Congress of the Communist International", Vol. 31, p. 241.

who are not fully removed from the land and the peasant economy, and are subject to the strong influence of religious, tribal and caste customs and petty-bourgeois ideas. That is why in many former colonies there are still no experienced and influential communist parties that have become a significant power in political affairs.

Lenin, however, appealed to Communists to safeguard the independence even of the embryonic forms of the communist movement, to believe in their immense revolutionary potential, attributing to them a special function exceeding the framework of the bourgeois-democratic national liberation movement. Lenin proposed the idea of attaining socialism not through capitalism, but bypassing or interrupting it, since, by contrast with the Second International leaders, he was sure that the Eastern peoples could, in the incipient world socialist revolution, avoid being doomed fatally to repeat the path of development of European countries and undergo all phases of capitalism; they had received the unique historical opportunity to avoid completely or cut short the capitalist stage by relying on aid from the victorious socialist revolution.

This innovatory idea, stemming from the teaching of Marx and Engels, acquired policy-making significance at the Second Comintern Congress. At that time the triumph of the non-capitalist path of development was naturally associated with leadership of the working class and its vanguard—the Communists. It was first carried out in that form in the national outlying regions of the former tsarist Russian empire and—beyond its frontiers—in the special conditions of the Mongolian People's Republic.

During the 1960s, a new possibility of non-capitalist development appeared; it has been socialist orientation of home and foreign policy under the leadership of revolutionary democrats. But what Lenin had said sixty years previously in his appeal mainly to Communists of the Soviet East fully relates to the fresh opportunities of sidestepping capitalism. Typically, all Lenin's remarks on this issue are intended to warn against running too far ahead, against leftist pseudo-revolutionary policies.

Lenin firmly opposed reckless suggestions for exporting revolution to backward countries. When a founder of the communist movement in India, Manabendra Nath Roy, known for his numerous errors and arguments with Lenin on strategic questions of the national liberation movement at the Second Comintern Congress, voiced the idea of a campaign by Indian Muslim émigrés and detachments of border tribes from Soviet



Central Asia into India through Afghanistan, Lenin showed the essential incorrectness and unreality of such a proposition.<sup>1</sup>

In Lenin's speeches, the Marxist, objective and consistent approach to the national liberation movement was manifest in particular relief by contrast with Roy's leftist adventure-seeking. Lenin warned against speeding up events, against making the socialist revolution an immediate issue, against putting before weak centres of the communist movement the unrealistic objective of achieving hegemony on a national scale, and against such centres setting themselves in opposition to an anti-imperialist movement led by bourgeois democrats. On the other hand, he urged recognition of its law-governed nature, an alliance with it, support for its democratic demands and their extension, work within the bounds of that alliance, intensifying one's influence over the people, yet realising full well and criticising the limited nature of bourgeois leadership, defending the class interests of the people and preserving one's independence. That was Lenin's position, the correctness of which is borne out by the present-day course of the revolutionary process.

Lenin opposed the mechanical application of ideas about socialist revolution and strategic propositions formed in the West to countries of the East, or uncritically extending Soviet experience to them. He called for Communists to "apply the spirit, the essence and the lessons of the ... experience" of Soviet Russia.<sup>2</sup>

In socio-economic policy Lenin recommended Communists in backward countries not to hasten with the introduction of socialism, to display maximum restraint and caution so as not to frighten away the waverers, not to undermine the confidence and understanding of the petty-bourgeois mass of the populace, to use all opportunities that internal and external capitalism makes available for economic development. In his letter "To the Comrades Communists of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Daghestan, and the Mountaineer Republic", Lenin sets out an economic and social programme of non-capitalist development, recommending, in particular, "a slower, more cautious and more systematic transition to socialism".<sup>3</sup>

Now those contingents of the communist, workers and national liberation movement in Asia and Africa which consistently favour a socialist orientation of their countries have

<sup>1</sup> See: *Kommunist*, No. 5, 1968, pp. 39-40.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "To the Comrades Communists of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Daghestan, and the Mountaineer Republic", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 318.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

the chance to further in every way the political and economic relations and all other, in particular military, forms of cooperation with the Soviet Union and the entire world socialist community. That is their tremendous historical advantage.

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Bourgeois propaganda continues to accuse Communists and Lenin of neglecting national and ethnic problems, asserting that for Lenin nationalism (and bourgeois political theorists see no distinction between nationalistic and nationalist) was a secondary issue, that he did not view nation as an important historical factor, and that he regarded socialism and democratic nationalism as belonging to different, completely unconverging planes.

In fact, for Lenin the national aspect was always the reality in which the class aspect was manifest in one form or another. Being internationalists, Lenin and the Communists of all countries fought and continue to fight for socialist revolution within the bounds of a given nation, within concrete national conditions. The most important and necessary factor in working out the strategy and tactics of the national liberation and socialist revolution is recognition of the uneven and spasmodic nature of capitalist development in the imperialist epoch and the possibility of socialism being victorious in a single country, and also consideration of national conditions and traditions. In regarding nationalism as something historically given and objective, Lenin was utterly opposed to nihilism in relation to it. He called for sensitivity, circumspection, mutual respect, account for distinguishing features in relations between peoples and revolutionary parties. For him a consistently democratic settlement of the national problem, was a task of the socialist revolution. But Lenin understood its complexity and protracted nature. The national question in practice takes much longer to solve than the class question. Lenin foresaw that "national antipathies will not disappear so quickly: the hatred—and perfectly legitimate hatred—of an oppressed nation for its oppressor *will last* for a while; it will evaporate only *after* the victory of socialism and *after* the final establishment of completely democratic relations between nations".<sup>1</sup>

Lenin not only did not see the national issue and socialism in different, diametrically-opposed planes, he was the first to see

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up", *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 353.



resistance to national oppression and colonialism as an important support for socialist revolution. He proclaimed the right of nations to self-determination as an inalienable principle of the Communist Party. He called for an alliance with the national liberation movement, for support for its efforts to eliminate oppression, and knew that democratic national movements fighting imperialism would eventually turn their blows against capitalist exploitation generally.

Lenin really did approach the national question from the standpoint of the interests of the working-class struggle and socialist revolution, rather than making an absolute of it, something that is characteristic of bourgeois nationalists. He was guided by those principles in both his domestic and his foreign policy and there lies one of his behests to his followers.

*Professor R. A. Ulyanovsky*

## CHAPTER 1

### REVOLUTIONARY PROLETARIAT AND LIBERATION MOVEMENT

A Marxist-Leninist approach to the national and the national-colonial issues has been basic for the Comintern in formulating its strategy and tactics towards the liberation movement in oppressed countries.

#### 1. IMPERIALISM, SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE NATIONAL-COLONIAL ISSUE

The founders of scientific socialism provided the most general theoretical solution of the national question at a time when they were working on the fundamentals of a materialist understanding of history. It was then that they looked at the question of the future of nations, of national contradictions and national movements in association with objectives of the class struggle of workers whose vital interests were common throughout the world. The founders of scientific socialism came to the conclusion that the proletariat, in fulfilling its world-historic liberating mission and carrying through a socialist revolution, would put an end to oppression of some nations by others. In drawing up the policy of the revolutionary working class, Marx and Engels regarded of paramount importance the class proletarian interests and their international embodiment—proletarian internationalism.

Back in 1848, Marx and Engels had formulated and developed their views in relation to a whole range of national questions. One after another in Europe revolutions had flared up drawing into action a motley mixture of proletarian, petty-bourgeois and bourgeois movements. Objectively, those revolutions were designed to resolve bourgeois-democratic tasks. At that time, many oppressed peoples rose up to fight for national liberation. Marx and Engels regarded the national movements against



reaction and absolutism as an aid to the revolutionary proletariat. The policy of the proletariat in regard to the national liberation struggle had to broaden the range of its allies in revolution—that was the notion to which Marx and Engels came and which they even then aspired to put into effect.

The attitude of the founders of scientific socialism to national movements was a selective one. As representatives of the working class (and revolutionary democracy), they upheld not all national movements, but only those directed against counter-revolutionary forces. Naturally, they used a proletarian-class criterion—regarding the proletariat's interests as paramount—and felt that their attitude to particular national movements could change; and indeed it did change.

A proletarian-class approach to the national question in the specific situation of the latter half of the nineteenth century depended on the tasks of the proletarian class struggle at that time. The establishment of national states was a major objective of bourgeois-democratic revolutions in countries suffering from medieval dissociation and isolation. The scattered nature of many nations remained one of the most irritating vestiges of the Middle Ages. As Marx and Engels pointed out, the proletariat was interested in forming national states; their establishment was a necessary condition of intensive economic development, consolidation of the working class and the further unfolding of its contention with the bourgeoisie; what is more, the proletariat was interested in uniting a country in a revolutionary way, "from below", as it were. Marx and Engels took full account of this when they advised the workers to take a particular position in a specific conflict.

Marx and Engels began to study the problems of the East more intensively at the beginning of the 1850s. Marx, in particular, displayed much interest in India. Together, Marx and Engels exposed the cruelty of colonialism and their selfish class interest. They deeply sympathised with the suffering of the peoples of India and other Eastern countries; they knew that those chapters in the history of Eastern peoples referring to capitalist development would, like the corresponding chapters of the peoples of Europe, be written in "the red-hot language of blood and fire" and would bear the stamp of hunger and deprivation. Nothing, however, was more alien to Marx and Engels than petty-bourgeois sentimentality, merely feeling sorry for the woeful condition and shedding tears over it. Indeed, they believed that the proletariat ought not to weep over the situation, but to act on its basis, fully taking account of the changes relating to the expansion of capi-

talism. The liberation movement in India, Marx concluded, was undermining the might of British capitalism. He did not preclude the possibility of India achieving independence before socialist revolution occurred in Britain. Marx and Engels worked out more detailed ideas about the possibility of successful popular struggle for political emancipation in the colonies before the proletarian revolution won in the metropolitan countries, and cited the experience of the Irish people's liberation struggle in the late 1860s and early 1870s to support their ideas. The founders of scientific socialism showed that even at that time a situation could in principle occur when a victorious struggle of a colonial people for independence would become a very important precondition of a triumphant socialist revolution in an oppressor country.

They felt that economically backward countries could, in certain conditions, bypass or interrupt the capitalist stage of development. Marx, however, certainly did not interpret the development of capitalism and the formation of its world system as the establishment of a homogeneous capitalist milieu, as a process which had to continue to the bitter end everywhere. In his view the power of capital was to be broken by the forces of protest and anger—in other words, by revolutionary forces, before it turned the entire working world into proletarians; and that revolutionary demolition of capitalist relations would have to take place precisely on their own basis.

In Marx's view, the circumstances necessary for bypassing or interrupting capitalist development had to arise as a result, first, of a socialist revolution carried out by the proletariat of capitalist countries and, second, by a democratic liberating revolution carried out by the people of a "backward" state. Later on, this Marxist idea was to be cast into oblivion by theorists of the colonial issue in the Second International. Moreover, the opportunist Hubert van Kol said at the International Socialist Congress that history had refuted that idea. It was only Lenin, as well as the Third, Communist, International, who referred to that idea and developed it into a tenet on non-capitalist development for economically backward countries.

Marx and Engels took a dialectical view of problems concerning the formation and development of nations and national states, concerning national movements and relations between nations and states, as they did of any subject under investigation. They regarded nations and national movements as historical realities, as factors that the proletariat was bound to deal with in its class struggle. Marx and Engels did not depart from proletarian-



class positions one iota, being able to differentiate between the selfish interest of the bourgeoisie and the liberating, revolutionary interest of the proletariat in the extremely complex nexus of national, national-state, and international contradictions that existed.

In supporting the progressive movements of oppressed nations, Marx and Engels did not, however, consider the right of nations to self-determination as pivotal in the revolutionary proletariat's policy on the national issue. As we can see from their works, they believed that focusing attention on that slogan would not meet the interests of workers at that time. The idea that crops up time and again in their works is that no people can be free if it oppresses others; this is certainly not a slogan of the right of nations to self-determination. It follows from that idea that the emancipation of an oppressor people and the emancipation of an oppressed people are processes that are intimately connected.

The above thesis by Marx and Engels, on the one hand, can and must be understood as an appeal to socialist revolution in the metropolitan countries; on the other, it can and must be understood, of course, also as an appeal to oppressed nations to struggle for liberation.

In the late nineteenth century the national question in the biggest countries of Western Europe was resolved as far as bourgeois-democratic changes allowed. Up to the 1860s, Italy, for example, was a conglomerate of big, medium, petty and tiny states ruled by narrow-minded, tyrannic provincial monarchs, who were just as merciless to their subjects as they were servile to the Austrian Empire. The black-and-yellow colours of the Hapsburgs were raised in Northern Italy. In the 1870s, however, this was already a united state in which the Italian proletariat was gathering its ranks. German democracy had not managed to unite the country "from below", it being united "from above" "by iron and blood". All the same, that was a step forward: here too the proletariat obtained a wide field of action for the impending battles with the bourgeoisie. At about the same time substantial changes began to take place in the economic affairs of the biggest capitalist nation states of Europe: monopolies replaced free competition, huge financial groups took shape as a result of the merger between banking and industrial capital, the export of capital sharply increased, the world was ultimately divided up among monopoly groups, and a battle began between capitalist powers for its repartition. Capitalism had entered the imperialist stage.

Now the centre of gravity of the national problem had shifted to the East—the centre of gravity precisely of the *national*

problem, and not the whole set of problems of revolution. The enslaved peoples of the East began to fight for the formation of their own nation states. That was the political meaning of movements for independence which, from the outset of the twentieth century and particularly after the 1905 Revolution in Russia, began to grow in the colonies and semi-colonies.

The liberation movements which were intensifying in the oppressed countries objectively had to become anti-imperialist movements. Of course, it could not be excluded that a particular national movement in the oppressed East could turn out to be an arm of imperialist reaction: both past and present displays examples of that. On the whole, however, the liberating storm that was sweeping the East (especially Asia) was directed against those powers which together made up the nucleus of the imperialist system. At the same time, the maturing proletarian, socialist revolution also had, as a matter of course, to direct its thrust precisely against imperialism. Moreover, in the new conditions the anti-imperialist actions of colonial peoples, even if they were being led by the propertied classes, objectively and on a world-historic scale had to acquire a certain anti-capitalist content: after all, they were directed against the offspring and bastion of capitalism—the imperialist colonial system. In such circumstances, the advocating of the right of nations to self-determination, including the right to form independent states, fell to the great merit of Lenin. He regarded that principle as directly linked with the need for the international consolidation of workers—a task which was of paramount importance.

In the new situation, the internationalist significance of the right of nations to self-determination was that it had to help revolutionise those peoples who had not yet settled "their" national question: they had just begun their fight for the right to form national states, the fight that was on the whole over for Western Europe (excluding the countries in the East and South-East of Europe). By their actions they were shaking the positions of classes which the coming proletarian revolution was to remove. In putting forward that slogan, Lenin on behalf of revolutionary social-democracy was calling on the oppressed peoples to unite with the revolutionary proletariat. At the same time, the train of events in the new epoch turned the liberation movements in the immense expanses of Asia against imperialism. Therefore, self-determination as a practical pivot of the revolutionary proletarian policy was now being advanced precisely on the basis of those proletarian-class ideas through which it had been advanced as such by Marx and Engels.



Lenin frequently made the point that the slogan was democratic rather than socialist by its content, and was formulated as a political demand of the revolutionary proletariat on the national and national-colonial issues in the period when it best met the class interests of the workers.

Many figures in the Second International were unable to understand the great changes which were occurring in the world, in particular the colonial world, at a time when imperialism was asserting itself. Even the left-wing members of the Second International, either Jean Jaurès, a man of justice, or August Bebel, a man of impeccable honesty and utterly dedicated to the proletarian cause, or the eminent theorist and practical leader of the revolution Rosa Luxemburg, were unable to work out a scientific concept of the national and national-colonial issues that would correspond to the new circumstances (even though Rosa Luxemburg did, in fact, put forward some very fruitful ideas). Nobody save the Bolsheviks gave serious attention to the decision of the London Congress of the Second International in 1896 which proclaimed the right of nations to self-determination. As formulated by the opportunists this decision was deprived of revolutionary meaning. What is more, it did not envisage the right of oppressed peoples to form a separate state and was not directly and unambiguously referring to the colonial and semicolonial peoples. It was soon cast into oblivion.

A many-sided analysis of the imperialist epoch—economic, social and political—was needed for the creation of a scientific concept of national and national-colonial issues. Only such an all-embracing analysis could produce reliable conclusion on the alignment of the major class-political forces in the world, and serve as the basis for outlining such a theory and policy on national and national-colonial issues that would fully meet the tasks of the mounting proletarian struggle.

In his very first works devoted to the colonial issue, Lenin indicated the capitalist essence of the policy of colonial seizures.<sup>1</sup> He emphasised that the rapidly developing capitalist industry required new markets and that colonial wars were being waged in the interests of a handful of capitalists.<sup>2</sup> Already in 1900 Lenin had pointed to the importance of the fact that European powers were quarrelling over division of the spoil, "and no one can say

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "The War in China", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 373-74.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

how this quarrel will end".<sup>1</sup> Colonial wars and national strife, Lenin noted, are used to divert popular discontent in the metropolitan countries from government policies.<sup>2</sup>

As the 1905 Russian Revolution came nearer, Lenin began to devote increasing attention to the national question in Russia. The 1905 Revolution certainly awakened Asia and caused a whole series of revolutions there. A new source of great world storms was opening up in Asia, which were having their "repercussions" in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

In early 1902, Lenin put forward the demand for "recognition of the right to self-determination for all nations forming part of the state" in the "Draft Programme of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party".<sup>4</sup> In February 1903, he highlighted the particular significance of internationalist education of the working class.<sup>5</sup> In Lenin's view, the most salient aspect of the entire policy of the Social-Democrats on the national question was the international unity of workers. In the summer of 1903 Lenin wrote an article in which he explained that "our unreserved recognition of the struggle for freedom of self-determination does not in any way commit us to supporting every demand for national self-determination".<sup>6</sup> Lenin insisted that the demand for national self-determination should be subordinated to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat.<sup>7</sup>

After the 1905 Revolution, Lenin published a detailed analysis of discussion on the colonial issue at the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International. He criticised the ideas of van Kol, Bernstein and David who believed that Social-Democrats were not obliged, as a matter of principle, to condemn every colonial policy. Lenin voiced the idea that the emergence in congress decisions of evasive phrases about the possibility of a principled recognition of the colonial policy would mean the International adopting a bourgeois point of view, a decisive step towards its subordination to "bourgeois imperialism".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx", *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, p. 584.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, 1974, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Does the Jewish Proletariat Need an 'Independent Political Party'?", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 333.

<sup>6</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The National Question in Our Programme", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 452.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 453-54.

<sup>8</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, 1972, p. 76.



Between 1908 and 1912, when revolutions were occurring in the East under the impact of the 1905 events in Russia, Lenin paid the closest attention to analysing the revolutionary possibilities of peoples enslaved by imperialism. He conducted this research within the bounds of his extensive work on creating a theory of imperialism and proletarian revolutions.

In July 1908 he wrote of the movements of oppressed peoples as a popular struggle "against capital and the capitalist colonial system, i. e., a system of enslavement, plunder and violence".<sup>1</sup> Here was the very first mention of the idea that the action of peoples against the capitalist colonial system was at the same time a fight against capital. So, gradually, step by step, the role that the movement of enslaved peoples was to play in the socialist transformation of the world became clear. In the same work, Lenin noted the growth in political consciousness of the young proletariat in colonial countries. Illuminating the panorama of liberation movements, actions and revolutions in the East, Lenin wrote in the same article of the social tension in Europe, the shooting of workers in France, and the hostility between proletariat and bourgeoisie in capitalist countries. Lenin's article, "Inflammable Material in World Politics" was the first publication in the socialist press to examine the liberation movement in countries of the East in its connection with the proletarian movement in the West and view both as different sectors of the developing common revolutionary front.

Lenin was the first to see the peoples of the East, who had risen to struggle, as possible allies of the proletariat. From 1908 Lenin's works steadily gave expression to the contemporary concept of "anti-imperialist struggle".

Before Lenin, imperialism had been seen only as a form of capitalist policy; therefore, the struggle against imperialism was understood only as action against aggression, against occupation, against colonial plunder. A qualitative leap had now taken place in furthering socialist thought. If imperialism was not only a policy of capitalism, but a stage of its growth, then the objective struggle against colonial tyranny was also action against the capitalist system. While the revolutionary proletarians of the West stood opposed to capitalism as a system of exploitation of hired labour, the peoples of the East opposed it primarily as a system of oppression of an economically backward world periphery, of oppression which constituted a condition for capitalism's existence

in its highest phase. Both movements, differing in their place within the world revolutionary process, in objectives, and in the degree of understanding these objectives, were directed, consequently, against the common enemy—capitalism as it entered its imperialist stage. What is more, in so far as the transition of capitalism to the imperialist stage (Lenin was to provide a detailed analysis of this transition later) and the growth of the revolutionary wave in the East were taking place at roughly the same time, the possibility emerged of attracting the awakening East to the proletariat as an active ally in the fight against capitalist oppression. That was a great scientific discovery of Lenin.

Lenin clearly designated three principal socio-political forces of the epoch: the capitalist countries, divided into hostile blocs preparing for war; the proletariat of those countries with their own parties, mass trade union organisations and experience of political and economic struggle; and the oppressed peoples of the colonies who were more and more vigorously fighting for national liberation. Lenin was able to see the new balance of forces in the world and, what is more, at a time when it was only just taking shape.

While he showed the panorama of the world revolutionary front with the liberation movement in the East as an important part of that front in his article "Inflammable Material in World Politics", four years later he wrote an article "Democracy and Narodism in China" (July 1912), in which he established the law-governed nature of the liberation movement in one of the biggest of oriental countries.<sup>1</sup> Now the object of his analysis was directly the national liberation zone of anti-imperialist struggle. He showed that Sun Yat-sen's programme was a platform of "the great Chinese democracy", that it fully understood the inadequacy of a "racial" revolution, that it represented republicanism and directly posed the question of the position of the masses, and of mass struggle. Revolutionary democracy existed in the East, Lenin believed, inasmuch as "in Asia there is *still* a bourgeoisie capable of championing sincere, militant, consistent democracy, a worthy comrade of France's great men of the Enlightenment and great leaders of the close of the eighteenth century".<sup>2</sup> There was, therefore, a bourgeoisie "that is rising, not declining".<sup>3</sup>

In that article, Lenin used China as an example to show in general outline the moving forces of liberation revolutions

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Inflammable Material in World Politics", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, 1977, p. 182.

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, pp. 163-69.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem.*



in the East and to explain their socio-political nature. He wrote of democratic revolutions in which bourgeois forces, which still retained a certain revolutionary-democratic charge, would play an active part. "Hundreds of millions of people" would take part in the popular revolutions in the East. They would fight for the same ideals as had already been won in the West. At the same time, he stressed, these were national liberation revolutions. The peasantry was the principal social support of the revolutionary-democratic bourgeoisie in the East. Vacillating bourgeois liberals would emerge along with the revolutionary-democratic bourgeoisie. Simultaneously a socialist movement of proletarians was developing in the West. The proletariat of the East would grow too. As far as the socialism being preached by Sun Yat-sen was concerned, Lenin regarded it mainly as an anti-feudal ideology, a sermon of radical agrarian reform.

Lenin tirelessly worked to elucidate the place of the peoples of the East in the coming socialist remoulding of the world. Yet another step forward was made in 1913. In his article "The Awakening of Asia", Lenin recalled that after the 1905 Russian Revolution, a wave of democratic movements had swept over Asia. Revolutions had occurred in Persia, Turkey and China. Revolutionary ferment was growing in India and Indonesia: "a nationalist movement has arisen under the banner of Islam" among the people of Java (Lenin was referring to the national-democratic organisation of Sarekat Islam). At the same time, workers in the capitalist countries were following growth in the liberation movement "in all its various forms, in every part of the world" with interest and approval. The proletariat of Europe and the democrats of Asia constituted the force that was replacing the reactionary bourgeoisie ruling the world. Lenin therefore more and more deeply and extensively developed the idea that the proletariat of Europe and the oppressed peoples of the East confronted by democratic revolutions could form a united front of world revolution on a world-historic scale.<sup>1</sup>

"The awakening of Asia and the beginning of the struggle for power by the advanced proletariat of Europe are a symbol of the new phase in world history that began early this century."<sup>2</sup> As subsequent events were to show, these words were prophetic. They provided a political description of the changes that were maturing with capitalism's conversion into its highest, imperialist stage.

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, pp. 83-84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Hundreds of millions of people live in Asia who are awakening to life, light and freedom; and no force on earth can wipe out their heroic democracy. And, as Lenin insisted, the international proletariat is their reliable ally.<sup>1</sup>

Before Lenin none of the revolutionary democrats had regarded the colonial problem in relation to the overall problem of world socialist revolution; no one before Lenin had given a consistently democratic meaning to the demand for self-determination of nations; no one before Lenin had paid such close attention to one of the most important features of the new stage in capitalism's development—completion of the world's partition among the biggest imperialist powers; no one before Lenin had seen with such perspicacity that the contradictions relating to the imperialist repartition of the world could and would lead to world war in the situation then prevailing.

As the war approached, national and national-colonial questions were attracting more and more of Lenin's attention. In 1913, he spoke once more in defence of the right of nations to self-determination, to secede and form an independent state. He provided full scientific and political grounds for that demand, at the same time criticising the programme of cultural-national autonomy, its fundamental flaw being desire to introduce "the most refined, most absolute and most extreme nationalism".<sup>2</sup>

In his work "Critical Remarks on the National Question", written between October and December 1913, Lenin noted two tendencies: one towards creating national states and the other towards breaking down national barriers. Both of them constituted the universal law of capitalism: the former tendency predominated at capitalism's initial stages, the latter was typical of "a mature capitalism that is moving towards its transformation into socialist society".<sup>3</sup> As Lenin pointed out on many occasions, the peoples of the East were at that time passing through the initial stage of capitalism, when the capitalist structure had only just come into being there.

The peoples of the East were, in their specific situation, following the path trodden before them by the peoples of Europe. Lenin's formula of the two tendencies demonstrated the

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Backward Europe and Advanced Asia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.



universality of Marxist theory. As far as the proletariat's and its party's practical policy was concerned, the need arose out of the dual tendency indicated by Lenin both to conduct an irreconcilable battle against bourgeois nationalism on the principle of proletarian internationalism, and to insist upon equal rights of nations and languages, as well as the right of nations to self-determination.<sup>1</sup> Lenin emphasised, "Bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism—these are the two irreconcilably hostile slogans that correspond to the two great class camps throughout the capitalist world, and express the *two* policies (nay, the two world outlooks) in the national question."<sup>2</sup>

In early 1914, Lenin returned to the idea that the epoch of national revolutions had culminated only in Western Europe. In January he wrote on the subject, "Epoch of national (bourgeois-democratic) revolutions of the nineteenth century (Italy, Germany). It is over in Western Europe. *It has just started in the East and in Asia...*"<sup>3</sup> Again and again Lenin returns to the image of "awakening Asia", again and again insists on the expediency of the slogan of self-determination of nations for an effective struggle for the proletariat's socialist goals.

Between February and May 1914 Lenin wrote one of his most outstanding works on the national question: "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination".<sup>4</sup> At that time Lenin was completing his analysis of contemporary capitalism—imperialism and its laws, and the study of this cardinal problem impelled him to refer repeatedly to the national question. In the article Lenin confirms the correctness and profound scientific nature of Marx's conclusion that, from the standpoint of national relations, the best conditions for the development of capitalism are undoubtedly provided by the national state.<sup>5</sup> The trend towards the creation of a national state arises ultimately on an economic basis. Since the urge to create a national state is present in a national movement and is caused by certain economic factors, the right of nations to self-determination should be understood by Marxists as the right to set up a separate state, as the right to state secession.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Theses for a Lecture on the National Question", *Collected Works*, Vol. 41, 1971, p. 314.

<sup>4</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, pp. 393-454.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 440.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 396-400.

A few years later, in 1918, Rosa Luxemburg came to believe for a time that the Soviet government, having taken up Lenin's initiative to regard self-determination of nations as recognition of the right to state secession, had done so exclusively from notions of falsely understood practical necessity, as if to gain the support of bourgeois sections of nations oppressed by tsarist Russia; moreover, she was to say that this measure had not brought the desired results, having led only to the disintegration of the Russian state. This assessment of the policy of the Bolsheviks, who consistently pursued a proletarian-class course on the national question, as on all other issues, and in conditions of socialist revolution, never counted on the support of the bourgeoisie in the outlying areas of the former tsarist empire, but regarded the bourgeoisie as a counter-revolutionary force, was fallacious (Luxemburg's assertion of the "disintegration of Russia" turned out to be just as unsubstantiated). Being a genuine revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg herself later admitted she had been wrong on a number of points.

Demand for self-determination of nations and for recognition of their right to secession as a separate state was never of merely practical significance for Lenin. It is, in fact, very difficult to distinguish between Lenin's practical and theoretical considerations: he did not make a single political step unless its expedience was supported by scientific theory. Thus it was with the question of self-determination of nations. As far as Lenin was concerned, this slogan was a pithy, precise and succinct expression of that mighty socio-economic tendency which had begun to develop in the countries that were economically backward, in the colonies and semi-colonies.

Referring again in his article to the history of capitalist development in Europe, Lenin concludes that two periods prevail, "which differ radically from each other as far as national movements are concerned". The first is "the period of the formation of the bourgeois-democratic society and state", a time of mass national movements and the involvement in them of the peasantry. The second is a time of already formed capitalist states with a mature antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat. At the same time, as in many other works, he says that bourgeois-democratic national movements in Eastern Europe and Asia, in the colonies and semi-colonies are by no means over. His last conclusion must be seen in direct relation to his notion that, following the end of the epoch of national movements and creation of national states in Western Europe, there begins an epoch which "may be called the eve of capitalism's



downfall".<sup>1</sup> His analysis of the national question relates most directly to the study of the common laws of the epoch and is an integral part of the developing theory of imperialism.

Lenin's article "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" posed yet another definite problem: the interrelationship between the proletariat of ruling nations and the bourgeois class of oppressed nations. It was closely bound up with the problem of self-determination of nations. Opponents of the self-determination slogan believed that it would be used largely by the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations. Lenin carefully examined the problem. If the proletariat of ruling nations were to advocate unqualified support for the bourgeoisie of oppressed countries, then the self-determination slogan really could be used by that bourgeoisie in its own selfish interests; in that case the proletariat of capitalist countries would find itself offering a hand mainly to the bourgeois classes of the East rather than to its "Asian comrades". That would mean collaborating with the bourgeoisie and degenerating into opportunism.

Lenin, however, did not provide a simple, unqualified answer to the question of interrelationships between the proletariat of the ruling nation and the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation. His answer, a result of many years of study of the problem, was as follows: to the extent that the bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation was contending with an oppressor nation, the proletariat would support it; to the extent that the bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation was advocating its own bourgeois nationalism, the proletariat would oppose it.

This was one of Lenin's most important ideas on the national and national-colonial issues. Before he could arrive at it, he had to assess a whole set of economic problems relating to the emergence and affirmation of monopoly domination, the appearance of finance capital and the export of capital to oppressed countries; he had to define the socio-economic basis of the national liberation movements in the colonies and semi-colonies and see the difference in epochs and conditions of development of capitalism in Europe and the East. He had, finally, to investigate all this in the closest possible approach to the practical task, which consisted in singling out and attracting the most mass and mighty ally

of the international proletariat. The above-mentioned dialectical thesis already contained the nucleus of Lenin's theory on national and national-colonial issues which he elaborated comprehensively after the October 1917 Revolution in Russia.

In talking of the interrelationships of the proletariat of oppressor nations with the bourgeoisie of oppressed nations, Lenin had in mind by the latter chiefly the colonies and semi-colonies. Does that mean that Lenin was assuming that the centre of world revolution had shifted eastwards, that the decisive contradiction of the epoch was that between the oppressed peoples and imperialism? By no means. As mentioned earlier, Lenin felt that the centre of gravity of the national problem had shifted to the East, and not the whole nexus of revolutionary problems; it was by no means the major contradiction of the epoch that had shifted. A few years later Lenin was to speak of this at the Second Congress of the Comintern.

On 1914 the world imperialist war began. During the war years Lenin crowned his analysis of contemporary capitalism with his work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

What place did the national question, the problem of national liberation movements occupy in Lenin's theoretical and tactical-strategic studies during wartime?

It those years the problems of war, interrelations of nations and world relations were all intertwined in Lenin's analysis, as in real life, representing various aspects of the general problem—that of the future of proletarian revolution in Europe. From the very start of the war Lenin exposed its predatory and imperialist nature, showing that the only real content, meaning and significance of the war was "seizure of territory and subjugation of other nations, the ruining of competing nations and the plunder of their wealth, distracting the attention of the working masses from the internal political crises in Russia, Germany, Britain and other countries, disuniting and nationalist stultification of the workers, and the extermination of their vanguard so as to weaken the revolutionary movement of the proletariat".<sup>1</sup> Lenin showed the principal differences between national wars of the past and the imperialist war that had begun in August 1914. As far as the oppressed peoples of the colonies and semi-colonies were concerned, if in the battle for creating national states they

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, pp. 401, 406.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The War and Russian Social-Democracy", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 27.



had waged offensive wars, the sympathy of the international proletariat could only be with them.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin plainly exposed the falsity of so-called references to Marx and Engels for supporting the idea that in a war the proletariat should back the side whose victory would bring it greatest advantage. He showed that while the bourgeoisie had in one degree or another been interested in carrying through democratic changes, its progressive potential (as bearer of democratic, anti-feudal tendencies) was exhausted in all the imperialist countries of Europe; as a result, the proletariat should support none of the ruling classes of the European countries in a war.<sup>2</sup>

Again and again Lenin talked of the progressive nature of national liberation wars: "...These would be 'just', and 'defensive' wars, *irrespective* of who would be the first to attack; any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependent and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory 'great' Powers."<sup>3</sup> Lenin believed, for example, that the war of Morocco against France and of India against Britain merited the backing of the proletariat.

Lenin applied this idea with unswerving consistency. Another step was made in his comprehensive investigation of the problem concerning imperialism and prospects for socialist revolution. While hitherto Lenin had advanced the slogan of self-determination of nations, now he, as leader of the revolutionary proletariat, was indicating the *methods* of struggle for liberation. Among the methods he included an offensive war or, in other words, an insurrection. The slogan of self-determination of nations is now given concrete content corresponding to the circumstances; it rings out as a slogan calling on the proletariat of oppressor nations and the oppressed peoples to unite in the struggle against imperialism.

In his work "Socialism and War" written between July and August 1915, Lenin gave a concise formulation of the idea which ran through his numerous works and speeches and was to become a point of departure for his strategy: the world is divided into a handful of imperialist powers and people of the colonies enslaved by them. And just as he invariably combined the demand for self-determination of

nations with that of uniting the ranks of the international working class, so he always combined the idea of the world being divided into two unequal and inequitable groups of nations with the idea of unity of interests of the international proletariat and the oppressed peoples fighting against imperialism.<sup>1</sup>

This work contains one of Lenin's most important formulations on the national-colonial question: "Imperialism is the epoch of the constantly increasing oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of 'great' Powers; it is therefore impossible to fight for the socialist international revolution against imperialism unless the right of nations to self-determination is recognised."<sup>2</sup>

Lenin here formulates the very essence of his strategy on the national-colonial issue. This strategy may be expressed as follows. The right of nations to self-determination is a slogan corresponding to an objective, socially and economically conditioned tendency towards the formation of national states. It is not in itself a socialist slogan; its implementation alone is not a socialist change. At the same time, being addressed in the given situation primarily to peoples who were waging a struggle against imperialism or would wage it in the future, it could and would facilitate the involvement of democratic, non-proletarian movements in the oncoming "socialist international revolution against imperialism". That involvement by no means signified the conversion of movements of that type into socialist movements. That is impossible primarily because they occur in areas where capitalist relations are only just taking shape. But the "socialist international revolution against imperialism"—that most intricate process whose common socialist orientation will be defined by the international working class—can draw into its orbit the democratic, non-proletarian movements of the East already in the form in which they have taken shape, i.e., anti-feudal and bourgeois-democratic by their social content. Their anti-imperialist nature renders that possible. But for that to happen the movements must not be directed against the international proletariat or remain neutral in relation to it; they must energetically support it, seeing the working class as the leading force. That can only be ensured if the proletariat pursues a realistic policy, proving that it is interested in the successful promotion of bourgeois-demo-

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Lecture on 'The Proletariat and the War', October 1 (14), 1914", *Collected Works*, Vol. 36, 1971, p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Under a False Flag", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, pp. 135-57.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Socialism and War", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, pp. 300-01.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.



cratic changes in the East that could be achieved at the current stage through the fight for independence, national emancipation and statehood. Therefore, Lenin wrote, the socialist international revolution is impossible without recognising the right of nations to self-determination.

In his article "Several Theses", written in October 1915, Lenin replies to the question of what the proletarian party would do if revolution put it in power in the midst of the war: "...We would propose peace to *all* the belligerents on the condition that freedom is given to the colonies and *all* peoples that are dependent, oppressed and deprived of rights."<sup>1</sup> Lenin here regards the oppressed peoples as allies of the working class in the proletarian revolution in the most direct and "real" sense.

"There is no doubt," he writes, "that a victory of the proletariat in Russia would create extraordinarily favourable conditions for the development of the revolution in both Asia and Europe."<sup>2</sup> So we see that Lenin is speaking already of concerted action by the main revolutionary forces after the victory of proletarian revolution in one country, in Russia.

In his article "On the Slogan for a United States of Europe", written in August 1915, Lenin, basing himself on the law of uneven development of capitalist countries, concludes that socialism could prevail initially in a few or even in one separate capitalist country.<sup>3</sup> A year later, in the article "The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution", he stresses that "socialism cannot achieve victory simultaneously in *all* countries".<sup>4</sup> But could Russia become the first country to have a victorious socialist revolution? Here we must remember that Trotskyites tirelessly maintained that Lenin had provided a positive answer to that question only after the downfall of tsarism; and that answer, they claim, contradicted all that he had said before. Yet Lenin already in October 1915 mentioned the possibility of a victory for the Russian proletariat before socialist revolution won in other imperialist countries, a victory which would create the most favourable conditions for promoting revolution both in Asia and in Europe. This was the very first mentioned forecast of a balance of forces in the world which Lenin was to refer

to in his speech to the Second Comintern Congress, based on the fact that Soviet Russia was grouping around it the movements of the advanced workers in all countries and the national liberation movements in the colonies.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin refers to the problems of the national liberation movement in oppressed countries more and more frequently, linking them up with prospects for the revolutionary struggle for socialism.

In the initial text of his article "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", Lenin wrote: "The proletarian revolution will be an epoch of a whole number of battles on *all* fronts, i.e., on *all* economic and political, including national, issues. The resolution of the sum total of conflicts emanating from all these unresolved issues is what will produce social revolution. The sum total of battles that will occur because of all these changes is what will bring down the bourgeoisie and establish proletarian dictatorship, complete democracy and the organisation of socialist society. It is ridiculous to counterpose the revolutionary struggle against capitalism to the national struggle as *one* of the questions of democracy."<sup>2</sup> The notion that social revolution is not a single battle, but an epoch of a series of battles for economic and democratic changes culminating in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, is based on the theory of socialist revolution and has fundamental importance for elaborating general world strategy of the revolutionary proletariat, as Lenin frequently said.<sup>3</sup>

In his theses "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", written between January and February 1916, Lenin draws attention to the particular urgency of the demand for the right of nations to self-determination under imperialism; to the political conditionality and class content of that demand, as of all demands of political democracy; to the need to differentiate the specific tasks of Social-Democrats of oppressor and oppressed nations; to the actual coincidence between chauvinists and those Social-Democrats, particularly of Great Power nations, who do not insist on freedom of secession for colonies and nations oppressed by

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, pp. 403-04.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 404.

<sup>3</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 342.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 79.

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Complete Works*, Vol. 54, p. 464 (in Russian).

<sup>3</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 408.



"their" nations; to the need to subordinate the struggle for the self-determination of nations, and for all radical demands of political democracy, to the direct revolutionary popular struggle to overthrow the bourgeoisie and to bring about socialism.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Lenin never regarded the national question as separate from other socio-political problems of the epoch of imperialism and proletarian revolutions. In his article "The Junius Pamphlet"<sup>2</sup> of July 1916, in which he indicates certain errors contained in a work by Rosa Luxemburg on the national question (for example, her rejection of the possibility of national wars under imperialism)<sup>3</sup>, he uses the national question as a springboard for further comprehensive theoretical work. The course of his analysis is as follows: national wars against imperialist powers are inevitable and will have an increasingly revolutionary nature, but to be successful they must either combine the efforts of the vast number of people living in the oppressed countries, or have an especially favourable combination of international conditions, "or the *simultaneous* [with national wars against imperialism—A. R.] uprising of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in one of the big powers (this latter eventuality holds first place as the most desirable and favourable for the victory of the proletariat)".<sup>4</sup>

Lenin sees the strategy and tactics of revolutionary Social-Democrats on a world scale as follows: "...The main thing *today* is to stand against the united, aligned front of the imperialist powers, the imperialist bourgeoisie and the social-imperialists, and *for* the utilisation of *all* national movements against imperialism for the purposes of the socialist revolution."<sup>5</sup> Let us note the accent which Lenin puts on the word "*all*". Such an idea would have been unthinkable in the pre-imperialist epoch.

In the autumn of 1916, Lenin referred to the tasks of the new International, saying that it would in reality, not simply in words, consist of workers of both the oppressor and the oppressed nations.<sup>6</sup> He underlines at the same time

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, pp. 155-56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 305-19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 308-12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>5</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up", *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 343.

<sup>6</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 56.

that the action of the International must be united. At once he specifies and spells out his conclusions regarding the problem of the relations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation. He says that the international proletariat operates in two directions: the nationally oppressed proletariat and peasantry together with the nationally oppressed bourgeoisie act "*against* the oppressor nation", while the proletariat or its class-conscious section in the oppressor nation acts against the bourgeoisie and all its allies in the metropolitan countries.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Lenin again draws attention to the tasks of the proletariat of the oppressed countries—the colonies and semi-colonies; he spells out these conclusions made immediately after the 1905 Russian Revolution and after that chain of revolutions which took place in the East soon after revolution in Russia. As if completing his pre-revolutionary studies on the policy of the working class in regard to national liberation movements, Lenin says in his "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution" that "the mighty uprising of 1905 left a deep imprint, and that its influence, expressed in the forward movement of *hundreds and hundreds* of millions, is ineradicable".<sup>2</sup>

It was already January 1917 when Lenin was saying this. The key conclusion of his "Lecture" was: "We must not be deceived by the present grave-like stillness in Europe. Europe is pregnant with revolution."<sup>3</sup>

After the February 1917 Revolution, Lenin regarded the national question mainly as a factor capable of exerting a considerable influence on the conversion of democratic revolution in Russia into socialist revolution. For example, in his work "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution", written in April 1917, which was effectively a draft platform for Bolshevik policy, he devoted a special section to agrarian and national programmes.<sup>4</sup> He said that the proletarian party must advocate the proclamation and immediate realisation of complete freedom of secession from Russia for all nations and peoples who were oppressed by tsarism, or who were forcibly joined to or forcibly kept within the boundaries of the state.<sup>5</sup> He drew attention to the fact that the proletarian

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 252.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>4</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, 1974, pp. 71-73.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.



party was striving to create as large a state as possible, for that was to the advantage of the working people, to draw nations closer together, and bring about their further fusion; but that it desired to achieve that aim not by violence, but exclusively through a free fraternal union of the workers and the working people of all nations.<sup>1</sup>

The Resolution on the National Question of the Seventh All-Russia Conference of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks), held in April 1917, put forward specific demands that were based on Lenin's study of national and national-colonial issues and fully accorded with the strategic policy of the Bolshevik Party oriented on the growth of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into socialist revolution. All nations that were part of Russia had to enjoy the right to free secession and to the formation of an independent state ("Only the recognition by the proletariat of the right of nations to secede," explained Lenin, "can ensure complete solidarity among workers of the various nations and help to bring the nations closer together on truly democratic lines").<sup>2</sup> The proletarian party would have to decide the question of the expediency of secession by a particular nation at any moment in each separate case quite independently, depending on the interests of social development as a whole and the interests of the proletarian class struggle for socialism. It formulated the demand for broad regional autonomy which would be guaranteed, in particular, by the fact that the borders of self-governing and autonomous regions would have to be defined with account for economic conditions, national composition, etc., by the local residents themselves. The Party emphatically rejected "national cultural autonomy" which "strengthens the ties between the workers and the bourgeois culture of their nations, whereas the aim of the Social-Democrats is to develop the international culture of the world proletariat".<sup>3</sup> The Party also demanded the legislative revoking of all privileges hitherto enjoyed by any particular nation, and all infringements of the rights of national minorities: the workers of all nationalities of Russia were to merge in joint proletarian organisations—political, trade union and others, but this was to be a unity that would enable the proletariat

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 302.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

to pursue a victorious struggle against international capital and bourgeois nationalism.<sup>1</sup> "By rejecting the oppressed nations' right to self-determination, the socialists of the oppressor nations become chauvinists, giving support to their own bourgeoisie."<sup>2</sup>

The Bolshevik Party launched a broad and full-blooded campaign to win the masses, having equipped itself with Lenin's plan for advancing to the second stage of the revolution and developing it from bourgeois-democratic to socialist one. The programme on the national question outlined by Lenin became an important integral part of this overall plan. Lenin proposed changing paragraph 9 of the RSDLP(B) Programme where it referred to "*The right of self-determination for all member nations of the state*", to the following text: "**The right of all member nations of the state to freely secede and form independent states**".<sup>3</sup>

On the eve of the October 1917 Revolution, the Bolshevik Party appealed to the people with the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination, to state secession; it saw this slogan as a mobilising force of the same importance as, for example, demands for partitioning landowner lands or immediate withdrawal from the war. The self-determination policy was one of the major strategic courses leading the people to socialist revolution.

By the time of the October 1917 Revolution, Lenin's ideas on national and national-colonial issues had already become an all-round system, an integral part of the theory of imperialism and proletarian revolutions.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEORY OF THE NATIONAL-COLONIAL QUESTION AFTER OCTOBER 1917. LENIN'S FIGHT AGAINST REVISIONIST VIEWS AT THE SECOND COMINTERN CONGRESS

Proletarian revolution took place in Petrograd on 25 October 1917. Under Lenin's guidance, the Bolshevik Party combined in a mighty revolutionary stream the fight of the working class for socialism, the broad peace movement, the peasant

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 302-03.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 427.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Materials Relating to the Revision of the Party Programme", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 472.



movement for land, the national liberation aspirations of the peoples of Russia oppressed by the bourgeoisie and landowners, and directed them against capitalism. The triumph of the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 was the result of the practical application of Lenin's theory of socialist revolution.

In the Decree on Peace, signed by Lenin, the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets emphatically condemned the imperialist policy of annexation. The Decree provided a precise and exhaustive definition of the concept "annexation", excluding the possibility of any loophole, any wilful interpretation of that concept by the imperialists. What is more, the Soviet government indicated that nations had the right independently, without the slightest coercion, to decide the question of the forms of their statehood. In this exceptionally important state act of proletarian dictatorship, adopted in the first twenty-four hours of its existence, the worker-peasant government of Russia was speaking in the defence of the right of any nation being oppressed, "irrespective also of the degree of development or backwardness of the nation forcibly annexed to the given state, or forcibly retained within its borders", as well as of whether "this nation is in Europe or in distant, overseas countries".<sup>1</sup>

For their victory over the forces of counter-revolution and intervention, the Bolsheviks and peoples of Russia owed much to the scientific, realistic policy on the national question drawn up by Lenin and with which the Bolsheviks approached the October Revolution. The slogan of self-determination of nations, their right to state secession, was of enormous significance in uniting the peoples of the new Soviet state. As Lenin had foreseen, the consistent implementation of this slogan led to the unification rather than to the disunity of the working people.

The impact of socialist revolution in Russia, opening up a new era of world history, on the oppressed peoples of the East was tremendous.

First, the October Revolution directly affected the peoples of the East mainly as a democratic revolution which resolved, in particular, the national question, proclaiming and ensuring equal rights for all nations. It was this aspect of the socialist revolution in Russia that attracted to it the greatest

attention of revolutionary patriots in the Eastern countries who headed or were intending to head a popular movement for liberation. Many Communists of the East came to Marxism-Leninism having initially experienced this effect of the October Revolution in Russia. Second, the course of events in Russia, Europe and the whole world after the triumph of the October 1917 Revolution utterly demonstrated how right Lenin had been in his evaluation of the balance of socio-political forces in the world and how realistic had been his forecast of the likely change in that balance after the proletarian revolution. It shifted radically and, moreover, in the direction foreseen by Lenin: the first country of a victorious proletariat became the bastion and centre of attraction of world revolutionary forces. Around it were grouped the revolutionary movements of the proletariat of capitalist countries and the liberty-minded peoples of the East.

The setting up of the Communist International became possible only after the radical change in the international situation caused by the victory of the October 1917 Revolution. The influence of Marxist ideas grew immeasurably throughout the world. Communist parties began to appear under the impact of the October Revolution, and the years 1918-19 were a flashpoint of revolutionary activity in Europe. In January 1918 some two million workers in Austro-Hungary and Germany went on strike against the onerous terms presented to Soviet Russia in concluding the Brest Peace. In the same month a proletarian revolution took place in Finland where the worker government lasted until May. In September that year a soldier mutiny took place in the Bulgarian army, put down by the government with the help of foreign troops. In October and November the Austro-Hungarian monarchy tumbled after military defeat and as a result of upsurge in the revolutionary movement. Revolution in Germany broke out in November (although collaborationists halted the revolution at its bourgeois-democratic stage). A mass strike movement swept many European states in early 1919. And the oppressed peoples of the East began to stir: the most important of such actions were the 4th May Movement in China, the Amritsar events in India and the uprising in Korea. The peoples of Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Mongolia took up the liberation struggle.

Already in December 1918, the Communists of Russia were appealing to the Communists of other countries swiftly to unite in a Third, Communist International. And on 2 March

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, 1972, p. 250.



1919, the International Communist Conference began in Moscow. Its members included representatives of Iran, China, Korea and Turkey. On 4 March the Conference constituted itself as the First (Foundation) Congress of the Communist International.<sup>1</sup>

The First Comintern Congress adopted several documents of historic importance. They included the Platform of the Communist International, which emphasised that "a new epoch is born! The epoch of the dissolution of capitalism, of its inner disintegration. *The epoch of the communist revolution of the proletariat.*"<sup>2</sup> Capitalism had brought humanity to the danger of complete annihilation and there was only one force to save it, that force being the proletariat.

The Manifesto of the Communist International to the Proletariat of the Entire World, signed by delegation representatives (Lenin for Russia), said, "We communists, the representatives of the revolutionary proletariat of various countries of Europe, America, and Asia, who have gathered in Soviet Moscow, feel and consider ourselves to be the heirs and executors of the cause whose programme was announced 72 years ago"<sup>3</sup> (reference is to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* by Marx and Engels). The document described the reasons and consequences of the world imperialist war. In that connection, it noted, "The last war, which was not least a war for colonies, was at the same time a war fought with the help of colonies. The colonial populations were drawn into the European war on an unprecedented scale. Indians, Negroes, Arabs, and Madagascars fought on the European continent—for what? For their right to remain the slaves of England and France. Never before has the infamy of capitalist rule been shown up so clearly; never before has the problem of colonial slavery been posed so sharply as it is today."<sup>4</sup> It drew attention to the "revolutionary ferment in all the colonies", and put forward the following thesis: "The emancipation of the colonies is possible only in conjunction with the emancipation of the metropolitan working class."<sup>5</sup> It was assumed, further, that a socialist Europe would

render all-round help to the liberated colonies. This part of the Manifesto of the First Comintern Congress concluded with the words, "Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will also be the hour of your own liberation!"<sup>1</sup>

The relevant part of the document highlighted an appeal to the peoples of Asia and Africa to wage a vigorous struggle against imperialism; it spoke of the community of interests of the proletariat of Europe and the oppressed peoples of the colonies.

The victory of proletarian revolution in Russia actually meant liberation for the oppressed peoples of the tsarist empire. The future showed that the *Manifesto's* forecast came true. But development did not move in a straight line: from victory of the working class of the metropolitan countries directly to political liberation of the colonies. The actual path was more complicated: from victory of socialist revolution in one country—a victory which led to the establishment and strengthening of the first proletarian state and which had an unprecedentedly great impact on various liberation movements throughout the world, in total forming the "socialist international revolution against imperialism" with the working class as the advanced and guiding force—to elimination of the world imperialist monopoly, narrowing the sphere of its activity, shaking its socio-political and economic system, to the triumph of socialist revolutions in several countries, and to the downfall of the colonial system. The *Manifesto's* prophecy has also come true on help by socialist Europe to the liberated colonies "with its technology, its organization, its spiritual forces, in order to facilitate their transition to a planned and organized socialist economy."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, from the first moment of its existence, the Third, Communist International addressed the oppressed people of the East as allies in the fight against imperialism and colonialism, and acted as the first world, genuinely revolutionary organisation.

The Second Comintern Congress took place between July and August 1920, equipped with the ideological-theoretical, tactical-strategic and organisational tenets of Lenin and thereby making a considerable contribution to the cause of combining Marxism-Leninism with the international workers movement.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>1</sup> See: *Kommunistichesky Internatsional. Kratky istorichesky ocherk*, Politizdat, Moscow, 1969, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> *The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents*, Selected and Edited by Jane Degras, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, London, 1956, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.



The Congress gathered in a situation of the gravest hostility between the state of proletarian dictatorship and the forces of imperialism and internal reaction, in a situation of unprecedented revolutionary popular activity in East and West. The obtaining situation demanded combining the movement of hundreds of millions of oppressed people in the colonies and semi-colonies with the struggle of the proletariat in the metropolitan countries in a joint assault on imperialism, and consolidating all the anti-imperialist forces around the Soviet state. It was therefore understandable that the national-colonial problem should be seen by the Congress as one of the most paramount.

Lenin guided the entire preparatory work of the Congress and did much to elaborate this aspect of the agenda.

Lenin's "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions" written in early June 1920 was a specific and generalised expression of his ideas in regard to the liberation movements of oppressed peoples.<sup>1</sup>

When Communists talk of the equal rights of nations, they associate it with class struggle, not with a "natural right". A demand for equality, wrote Lenin, should read as a demand to destroy classes. Here he stresses that genuine equality of nations can be achieved only under socialism. This thesis constitutes a point of departure for further analysis. In contending with the lies and hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy, Communists should give priority in the national question to a precise account of the specific historical and, above all, economic situation, not to some abstract and formal principles, and they should single out "the interests of the oppressed classes, of working and exploited people, and the general concept of national interests as a whole, which implies the interests of the ruling class" and, finally, take into consideration the partition of the world into two groups of nations—the oppressed and deprived on the one hand, and the oppressor, privileged on the other, a division about which Lenin constantly spoke when describing the international situation following the growth of capitalism into its imperialist stage.

Thus, the policy of the Communist International on national and colonial issues was aimed primarily at bringing together proletarians and working people of all nations and countries for joint revolutionary struggle to overthrow the landowners

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 144-51.

and the bourgeoisie. The "Preliminary Draft" shows the main way to bring them closer: to unite the movements of advanced workers of all countries and the national movements of the colonies and semi-colonies around Soviet Russia.<sup>1</sup> Such unity was to occur as the workers of all countries and the working people of the colonies and semi-colonies would be convinced by their own bitter experience that their only hope lay in the victory of Soviet government over world imperialism. Hence the policy of an alliance of all national liberation movements with Soviet Russia. The forms of that alliance, however, depended on the objective degree of development of the communist movement and the liberation movement of a bourgeois-democratic nature in a particular oppressed country.

One should never tire of explaining, Lenin said, that only the Soviet system can provide equal rights in practice to nations. Communist parties should help the revolutionary movements of oppressed nations. They should wage a tireless struggle against bourgeois nationalism, take up internationalist positions not in words but in deeds, subordinate the interests of proletarian struggle in one country to the interests of class struggle of the proletariat on a world scale.

Further, Lenin focuses attention, as he says, on nations that are "more backward".<sup>2</sup> In other words, he is referring to those countries to which the slogan of self-determination of nations was primarily addressed—to the colonies and semi-colonies.

The entire eleventh thesis of the "Preliminary Draft" deals with the question of an alliance between the international proletariat and the liberation movement in the colonies. The thesis talks of the communist parties having to help the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in those countries; first and foremost this is the duty of the workers and Communists of the corresponding metropolitan countries. However, not all movements in the East deserve indiscriminate support: reactionary elements should be opposed, while the peasant movement against landowners, large-scale private land ownership and vestiges of feudalism should be given full support and imbued with the revolutionary spirit; the fundamental principles of the Soviet system should be applied in countries where precapitalist relations prevail. The eleventh thesis warned

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.



against bourgeois-democratic liberation movements in backward countries posing as communist; communist elements in the East should be rallied and educated to make them aware of their special tasks in counteracting bourgeois democrats; the Communist International would have to make a temporary alliance with bourgeois democrats in the colonies and backward countries, but not to merge with them and always to safeguard the independence of the communist movement even in its most rudimentary form, explaining to the people the intention of imperialists, under the guise of independence, to create states that would be fully dependent on them in economic, financial and military respects; one must be particularly circumspect about vestiges of traditional sentiments, customs and beliefs.

In the "Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions. July 26" Lenin dwelt on the most important aspects of the theses presented by the Commission for the plenary meeting of the Congress to study and showing the way for the proletariat to form an alliance with the oppressed, primarily the peasants, in the colonies and semi-colonies, i.e., with the majority of the world's population. First, there was the point about division of the world into oppressed nations and oppressor nations. Second, there was the notion that in the situation that had formed after the imperialist war, "reciprocal relations between peoples and the world political system as a whole are determined by the struggle waged by a small group of imperialist nations against the Soviet movement and the Soviet states headed by Soviet Russia. Unless we bear that in mind, we shall not be able to pose a single national or colonial problem correctly; even if it concerns a most outlying part of the world. The Communist parties, in civilised and backward countries alike, can pose and solve political problems correctly only if they make this postulate their starting-point."<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, Lenin dwelt on the idea of Communists having to support only those bourgeois liberation movements in the colonies that were really revolutionary; he thereby drew attention to the fact that the bourgeois classes of some oppressed countries could as a matter of principle still act in a revolutionary way.

Finally, among the decisive point of Lenin's theses we ought to mention the idea that the capitalist stage of devel-

opment is not inevitable for the peoples of backward countries. They may move to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, bypassing the capitalist stage. As we can see from the Report, Lenin had in mind both the partial as well as the full skipping of that stage, i.e., he allowed for the possibility of it being cut short; he was referring to the future of those "backward nations now on the road to emancipation and among whom a certain advance towards progress is to be seen since the war".<sup>1</sup> In talking of a "certain advance towards progress" in regard to countries with predominantly precapitalist relations, Lenin undoubtedly meant advance along the path of capitalism from medieval backwardness.

The possibility of "bypassing the capitalist stage" was examined in the Report in the following context. Lenin showed that Soviet organisation was applicable also to countries where precapitalist relations held sway as long as it became embodied in the form of peasant Soviets (councils), Soviets of the exploited, Soviets of working people. Experience has shown that in those countries which virtually lack an industrial proletariat the people may be awakened to independent political thought and independent political activity; peasants living in semi-feudal dependence are capable of assimilating the idea of Soviets. As Lenin put it, "It is unquestionable that the proletariat of the advanced countries can and should give help to the working masses of the backward countries, and that the backward countries can emerge from their present stage of development when the victorious proletariat of the Soviet Republics extends a helping hand to these masses and is in a position to give them support."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the question of political activity of the working people of oppressed countries, the nature of their mass organisations and the question of help from the victorious proletariat are viewed, as various aspects of the same question, the advance of backward countries "from their present stage of development". Further, Lenin sums up: the capitalist stage of development for peoples of backward countries is not inevitable.

In the period of preparation for and work of the Second Congress Lenin campaigned vigorously against sectarian and revisionist ideas on the national-colonial question. The Indian

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Second Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 241.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 243-44.



communist M. N. Roy was the leading exponent of that form of thinking.<sup>1</sup>

We shall deal now in some detail with the problems relating to the polemic between Lenin and Roy. For many reasons these questions merit the most careful consideration. During his disputes with Roy Lenin put forward several propositions that were of exceptional importance for the further elaboration of the theory, programme and tactics of the international communist movement and for its practical activity: on the united anti-imperialist front in the colonies and semi-colonies, on the role and place of the liberation movement of oppressed peoples in the world revolutionary process, on the tasks of Communists of the East, and on the non-capitalist transition to socialism. Roy advanced system of views that corresponded to the ideological aspirations of petty-bourgeois sections of the East, and has been propagated, without any noticeable modifications, by leftist and nationalist elements for many decades now. In countering these ideas, Lenin displayed his usual tact and principle. It can serve as an example for Communists who still have to combat theoretical views and practical actions that are in many ways similar to those which Roy had recommended in 1920. Finally, Lenin's polemic with Roy should be given particularly close attention also because its content and results are usually falsified by bourgeois and reformist historiography. For example, such writers as Franz Borkenau, Dietrich Geyer, Edward Carr, Günther Nollau, and Hugh Seton-Watson, as well as other historians, all cling to the same false idea, though worded differently, that Roy took up a "revolutionary" position, while Lenin was the "pragmatist"; Lenin made major concessions, it is said, as a result of which the Second Congress adopted two documents ("Lenin's Theses" and "Roy's Theses") which essentially contradict one another. None of this corresponds to reality.

<sup>1</sup> Manabendra Nath Roy, better known as M. N. Roy (though his real name was Narendra Bhattacharya), began his political activity as a member of a revolutionary nationalist organisation. Roy himself described the development of his political views as "a sudden jump from die-hard nationalism to Communism". Such a swift "psychological process", as Roy testified, resulted in his being unable fully to free himself of former ideological trappings, as was also the case with many other such people coming into the communist movement. Roy was a delegate to the Second-Fifth Comintern congresses, a candidate member and then member of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. He remained in the Comintern until 1929.

The questions relating to Lenin's polemic with Roy will be examined here in the following sequence: first, those which refer to the document of great importance—Lenin's amendments to the preliminary text of Roy's theses (as well as alterations made in Congress documents by the Commission on National and Colonial Questions working under Lenin's chairmanship); then, questions relating directly to discussion within the Commission. There naturally arises also the need for repeated reference to particular questions for the purpose of studying them more carefully—from various angles.

*Questions relating to changes made in Roy's theses by Lenin and the Commission.* Lenin's and Roy's theses coincide on fundamental issues in their final versions. At the plenary meeting of the Congress on 26 July Roy noted, "I have accepted some of the Commission's alterations of my theses" (he was referring to the Second Congress Commission on National and Colonial Questions).<sup>1</sup> The representative of the Communist Party of Holland said at the meeting on 28 July, "The theses were entirely brought into accord during discussion" (referring to the theses of Lenin and of Roy).<sup>2</sup> The Commission Secretary said, "I wish to state that I find no distinction between the theses of Comrade Roy and those of Comrade Lenin. They are alike in essence."<sup>3</sup> Talking of the work of the Commission, Lenin noted: "We have reached complete unanimity on all major issues."<sup>4</sup>

In his memoirs Roy wrote that the "Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Questions" were compiled at Lenin's suggestion. In Roy's words, Lenin, having read through his theses, suggested "some verbal alterations" (which the author of the Supplementary Theses readily accepted) and "said that as Chairman of the Commission, he would submit both documents for consideration".<sup>5</sup> From what Roy says it might appear that Lenin's corrections to the Supplementary Theses were insubstantial. But, as the sources show, Lenin's amendments were of a fundamental nature.

<sup>1</sup> *Vtoroi kongress Komintern, Partizdat, Moscow, 1934, p. 105.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> *The Second Congress of the Communist International. Report of Proceedings of the Petrograd Session of July 17th and of Moscow Sessions of July 23rd-August 7th, 1920, Moscow, 1920, p. 145.*

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Second Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 240.

<sup>5</sup> *M. N. Roy's Memoirs*, Allied Publishers Private Limited, Bombay, 1964, p. 381.



Let us refer to the copy of the preliminary text of the Supplementary Theses on which Lenin worked.

The fourth thesis recommended the Comintern to establish contact with those revolutionary forces in oppressed countries which aspired to bring down imperialism. Further Roy wrote (commencement of the fifth thesis): "These contacts between the Communist International and the revolutionary movement in oppressed countries do not mean support for the doctrine of nationalism." Lenin crossed out this sentence.

Lenin also excised the beginning of the seventh thesis: "The revolutionary movement in the colonies is essentially an economic struggle. The bourgeois-democratic national movement is limited to the small intermediate stratum which does not reflect popular aspirations. Without active popular support the national emancipation of the colonies will never be attained. But in many countries, especially in India, the masses do not follow bourgeois-nationalist leaders, and are advancing to revolution independently of the bourgeois-nationalist movement." Lenin also crossed out another part of that thesis where it said, "...It would be wrong to believe that the bourgeois-nationalist movement expresses the feelings and aspirations of the whole populace," as well as the sentences, "But the Communist International should not seek in them [the bourgeois-nationalist elements—A. R.] means for granting aid to revolutionary movements in the colonies. Mass movements within the colonies will grow independently of the nationalist movement. The masses do not put their faith in political leaders who constantly lead them astray and restrain them from revolutionary actions."

Lenin also crossed out the beginning of the ninth thesis: "The assumption that the peoples of the colonies are bound to pass through the stage of bourgeois democracy owing to economic and industrial backwardness is wrong. The course of events and the situation in many colonies do not bear out this assumption." And in the following sentence, "True, revolution in the colonies in its first stages will not be communist revolution", Lenin excludes, the word "True".

In the ninth thesis Roy had written, "Of course, in many of the Eastern countries it would be very difficult to resolve the agrarian question through purely communist principles." Lenin changed it to the following: "Of course, in many of the Eastern countries it would be absolutely wrong to try and resolve the agrarian question on purely communist

principles" (for Lenin's full correction to the ninth thesis see below).

Finally, Lenin removed the tenth and eleventh theses altogether. Their text was as follows:

"10. Bourgeois nationalist-democrats in the colonies are striving to set up a free national state, while the mass of workers and poor peasants are rising up—however unconscious that may be in many cases—against the system that permits such cruel exploitation. Consequently, we have two opposed forces in the colonies. They cannot develop together. Support for the colonial bourgeois-democratic movement would mean encouragement to the promotion of a national spirit which, of course, would hamper the awakening of class consciousness in the masses, while encouragement and support for revolutionary mass actions through the communist party of proletarians would awaken real revolutionary forces to actions that would not only bring down foreign imperialism, but would lead to the gradual development of Soviet power, thereby preventing the growth of domestic capitalism in place of the defeated foreign capitalism, further oppression and exploitation of the people.

"11. To begin class struggle in the colonies at the earliest possible stage would mean opening the people's eyes to the danger of transplanting European capitalism, which, being overthrown in Europe, may seek asylum in Asia, and removing such a possibility from the very start."

The theses read by Roy on behalf of the Commission at the Congress plenary meeting on 26 July 1920 and adopted by Congress differed from the original text on other points as well. That was the result of amendments made within the National and Colonial Commission working on 25 July under Lenin's chairmanship.

The third thesis contained two errors of principle which the Commission then removed. "In exploiting colonial masses, European imperialism is capable of giving a number of sops to the metropolitan proletariat," Roy had written. Here the Commission made an amendment. It now talked of sops not to the "proletariat" but to the metropolitan "workers' aristocracy". Besides, Roy's idea of the readiness of imperialism "to sacrifice the entire surplus value in the metropolitan states" (as was written in the initial version of his theses) so as to retain as before the vast superprofits in the colonies found no support in the Commission. The idea was altered and supplemented. In the first place, the Congress-adopted resolu-



tion referred to imperialism's readiness to sacrifice not "entire surplus value" in the metropolitan states (that would be equivalent to admitting that imperialism was prepared to renounce exploiting the proletariat), but merely "superprofit in the metropolitan states". Secondly, the Commission felt it necessary to add a point precisely on the stepped-up exploitation of workers in the metropolitan countries, which took place together with extraction of superprofits from the oppressed countries. The final version was: "While European imperialism, on the one hand, strives to reduce the living standard of the metropolitan proletariat, using the production of lower-paid workers of the subject countries. [this part of the sentence was absent in Roy's thesis—A. R.], it, on the other hand, would not flinch even from sacrificing superprofit in the metropolitan countries, so as to continue to obtain its vast superprofits in the colonies."<sup>1</sup> The Comintern, therefore, advanced to the forefront the community of interests of the metropolitan workers and the working people of the colonies and, at the same time, pointed out that it was imperialism that was trying to counterpose them.

Further, the first sentence of the fourth thesis in the original text went as follows: "Without destroying the colonial empire it is considered impossible to bring down the capitalist system in Europe." The final version read: "Destruction of colonial rule together with proletarian revolution in metropolitan countries will bring down the capitalist system in Europe." This thesis was supplemented by the following concluding sentence: "In order to ensure the ultimate success of world revolution, it is necessary for these two forces to take joint action" (i.e., "proletarian revolution in the metropolitan countries" and "those revolutionary forces that aspire for overthrowing imperialism in countries oppressed politically and economically").

Roy's eighth thesis went as follows: "Most colonies already have organised socialist and communist parties," while the final version speaks only of "organised revolutionary parties".

An analysis of Roy's propositions removed from the Supplementary Theses by Lenin and the Commission he headed shows that these propositions represented a certain set of views. Their essence may be reduced to the following.

The national-democratic movement, Roy believed, did not

reflect popular aspirations; it did not enjoy popular support, its leaders lost the trust of the working people; that movement stood opposed to the anti-capitalist movement of workers and poor peasants; the joint development of these movements was out of the question; the "national spirit" of oppressed peoples did not constitute a revolutionary force; in so far as the national-democratic movement was increasingly being deprived of popular backing, it could not be successful; as a result of that, it would be inexpedient for Communists to give support to the "colonial bourgeois-democratic movement".

Since, Roy reasoned, the national-bourgeois leaders were increasingly alienating themselves from the people, the Communists of the oppressed countries had ample opportunity to take leadership of the mass movement, and conditions for that had already matured in most of the countries; in case proletariat was lacking or weak, communist parties might be set up from elements of the oppressed peasantry; under the leadership of local communist parties, that stood opposed to "bourgeois nationalist-democrats", the peoples would obtain emancipation from imperialist tyranny and, at the same time, avert the development of local capitalism; the bourgeois-democratic stage of revolution was not obligatory for peoples of the colonies. It should be stressed particularly that here reference was not to bourgeois-democratic *transformations* (their need at the initial stage of revolution in the colonies was admitted by Roy), but to the *political hegemony* by bourgeois-democratic, national-revolutionary forces. Objectively, that meant that the task of communist parties in the colonies should be in all circumstances to campaign directly for power. Finally, Roy maintained, social revolution in the colonial countries was an indispensable condition for destroying the capitalist system in the metropolitan states.

These notions, it is not difficult to see, contradicted Lenin's position on the national-colonial issue.

Lenin based himself on the idea that Communists in the oppressed countries, in certain conditions, can and must become a vanguard force in the fight for national liberation. Marxism-Leninism, acting in support of anti-imperialist nationalism, at the same time patently understands the fundamental limitation of bourgeois-nationalist forces, their penchant for compromise, and therefore consistently fights against reactionary manifestations of nationalism. Lenin felt it a vital task of Communists to popularise their internationalist philosophy, pointing to the progressive role of the awakening of the

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin i Kommunistichesky Internatsional, Politizdat, Moscow, 1970, p. 203.



national self-awareness of the oppressed peoples; and he emphasised that a revolutionary and nationalist East was a growing anti-imperialist force.<sup>1</sup> He saw the bourgeois-democratic (especially *peasant*) liberation movement in the backward countries as an ally of the world proletariat. In advocating support for truly revolutionary bourgeois-democratic forces in the colonies—on condition that communist elements retain their organisational and ideological independence—Lenin was essentially formulating for the first time the task of creating a joint anti-imperialist front. At the same time he called for “determined struggle against attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries”.<sup>2</sup>

Lenin did not believe that the coming to power of communist parties in backward countries was an obligatory condition for the entry of these countries upon a non-capitalist course of development. As far as he was concerned, the slogan of Soviets for countries of the East did not mean demands for immediate establishment of proletarian dictatorship; reference was to peasant Soviets, i.e., bodies of government that were non-proletarian in their class nature.

He saw the task of Communists in oppressed countries as being “to arouse the working masses to revolutionary activity, to independent action and to organisation, regardless of the level they have reached; to translate the true communist doctrine, which was intended for the Communists of the more advanced countries, into the language of every people; to carry out those practical tasks which must be carried out immediately, and to join the proletarians of other countries in a common struggle”.<sup>3</sup> Addressing Communists of the East, Lenin said: “You will have to base yourselves on the bourgeois nationalism which is awakening, and must awaken, among those peoples, and which has its historical justification.”<sup>4</sup>

In that connection, it is understandable why Lenin could not agree with Roy's notion that the Communist International should not support the “doctrine of nationalism”. Roy

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, “Better Fewer, but Better”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, 1976, pp. 499-500.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, November 22, 1919”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

had utterly left out of account the anti-imperialist, progressive aspect of the nationalism of oppressed peoples. Such treatment of the question, not based on a sober assessment of the situation in the colonies and semi-colonies, could serve as an obstacle in the way of uniting all national forces in the fight against imperialism. At the same time, Lenin gave prime importance to the link between the national liberation movement and the international struggle of the proletariat, who was “the only ally of all the hundreds of millions of the working and exploited peoples of the East”.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin's treatment of the nature and stages of revolution in each backward country was directly bound up with his overall assessment of the place of the national liberation movement within the world revolutionary process. This relationship is particularly apparent in Lenin's work on Roy's ninth thesis.

The initial content of that thesis amounted to the following: the liberation movement in the colonies should not necessarily be led by national-revolutionary, bourgeois-democratic forces; that is clear from the course of events and the situation in many colonies; true, revolution in the colonies at its initial stages will not be communist in the sense that it has to begin with general democratic changes, particularly with land division (after all, it would be very difficult to resolve the agrarian question on purely communist principles); but that does not mean that the communist vanguard should cede leadership of the revolution to bourgeois democrats.

After Lenin's work on that thesis it acquired the following sense: revolution in the colonies at the initial stages will not be communist; it has to be commenced with changes of a general democratic nature; any attempt to resolve the agrarian question on purely communist principles would be absolutely wrong; yet that does not mean that the communist vanguard should cede leadership of the revolution to bourgeois democrats (besides, note should be taken of changes already made to other theses: they no longer contained assertions that bourgeois national-democratic movements do not reflect popular aspirations and do not enjoy popular backing).

Lenin's amendments resulted also in a radical change of the sense in that part of the ninth thesis that referred to the impermissibility of letting bourgeois democrats take leadership of the revolution in the colonies. For Roy, who assumed that

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.



objective conditions already existed for Communists to take the leading role in the revolutionary movement of peoples in the colonies, this notion meant that one should not concede to bourgeois democrats what he believed had already been gained by Communists—leadership of the mass movement. That too was expressed in the initial version. Roy based himself on the idea that working people of the backward countries do not trust nationalist leaders and would not follow them. That did not accord with the facts. Lenin, however, believed that from the very outset Communists should conduct a *struggle* for leadership and for attracting the working people of oppressed countries to their side, and not to base themselves on the assumption that they had already gained hegemony.<sup>1</sup>

Other amendments were made to the draft documents on national and national-colonial issues. Speaking at the plenary meeting on 26 July, Lenin said that the Commission had decided

<sup>1</sup> Lenin paid particular attention to fighting for leadership of the people, to work to educate and organise them in a revolutionary spirit, to awaken in them an aspiration for independent political thought and independent political activity even where there was virtually no proletariat (i. e., in backward countries)—work on which Lenin oriented Communists of the East in his report of 26 July (see: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 241-43). The bourgeoisie was generally not interested in the people's independent political thought and independent political action. As we see from Lenin's ideas contained in the 26 July report, the maximum that might be expected in that sense from members of bourgeois liberation movements in the colonies was that "their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organising in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the mass of the exploited" (*ibid.*, p. 242). In that sense Roy was right when he wrote in the ninth thesis of the initial version of his document that "if leadership from the very outset will be in the hands of the communist vanguard, the revolutionary masses will follow a true path to attain the set goal through gradually acquiring revolutionary experience" (*V. I. Lenin i Kommunistichesky Internatsional*, p. 204). He actually paraphrased Lenin's ideas and these words were left in final text. They did not oppose Lenin's ideas that Communists should win political leadership of the masses; on the contrary, they emphasised that the path to that lay through "gradually acquiring revolutionary experience". Political leadership of the masses by Communists, Lenin believed, was not a point of departure but a result of acquiring such experience. In order for the broad masses of the working people really to take up a stand either of direct support for the vanguard, or at least of sympathetic neutrality towards it, they must have their own political experience (see: V. I. Lenin, "Left-Wing Communism—an Infantile Disorder", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 93). That is one of the paramount ideas contained in Lenin's work. Let us note too that in this work, where he sharply opposes attempts by individual Communists to approach leadership of the people from the very outset, he sometimes uses the term "leadership" as a synonym for the concept "strategy and tactics", bearing in mind bringing the people to the side of communist parties so that the parties could become their leader, their guide in the true meaning of the word (*ibid.*, pp. 25, 92-93). So, retention of Roy's above-mentioned formulation did not in any way signify a concession to leftism.

almost everywhere to substitute the term "national-revolutionary" for the term "bourgeois-democratic".<sup>1</sup>

Lenin felt that the term "national-revolutionary" in regard to the bourgeois-democratic allies of the proletariat in the colonial countries was more exact. This is testified to, in particular, by yet another of Lenin's documents referring to the Second Congress work. Sometime during the late part of July 1920 Lenin went over the proofs of his "Preliminary Draft Theses" in the English edition of the Communist International periodical and, in so doing, made a correction to the sixth thesis. The text said that "it is necessary to pursue a policy of implementing the closest alliance between all national and colonial-liberation movements and Soviet Russia, defining the forms of that alliance according to the degree of development of the communist movement among the proletariat of each country or the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement of workers and peasants in backward countries". Instead of "bourgeois-democratic" Lenin wrote "national-revolutionary", crossing out therefore the words "liberation" and "workers and peasants".<sup>2</sup>

In that connection it is important to note the following.

First, Lenin preferred the term "national-revolutionary" (movement), stressing thereby the national character of the liberation movement in the colonies. Second, replacement of the term "bourgeois-democratic" by the expression "national-revolutionary" meant that Communists should and would support bourgeois-liberation movements only when they were genuinely revolutionary.<sup>3</sup>

An analysis of documents on which Lenin and the National and Colonial Commission worked enables us also to shed additional light on the attitude of Lenin and the Comintern to non-capitalist transition to socialism.

The idea that the "masses in backward countries can attain communism through non-capitalist development, under the leadership of a class-conscious proletariat of the advanced countries" appeared in the Supplementary Theses, not in the main document. But its author was not Roy. In actual fact, this proposition was absent in the initial text. Instead there was in the seventh thesis Roy's assertion on the lack of trust of working people in nationalist leaders and on the exclusion of bourgeois-national elements as possible allies.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> *Kommunist*, No. 7, 1967, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 242.



We ought to note, however, that Roy's tenth thesis excised by Lenin contained a sentence on preventing the growth of local capitalism. But this "prevention", in Roy's opinion, had to be achieved through renouncing support for the bourgeois-democratic movement, through struggle against it. At the same time, Lenin pointed to the need for members of future proletarian, communist (not only in name) parties to understand clearly their class objectives, speaking also of the need for a temporary alliance with bourgeois democrats.<sup>1</sup> Besides, Roy ignored the factor of utmost importance—"leadership [from without—A.R.] of the class-conscious proletariat of the advanced countries".<sup>2</sup>

In his memoirs, where he talked of disagreements with Lenin, Roy described them as follows. He, Roy, did not agree with Lenin's idea that the national bourgeoisie at certain stages could play a historically revolutionary role and that Communists had therefore to render in support. In Roy's opinion, just like the democratic movement in Russia, the liberation movement in a colonial country was to grow into proletarian revolution, otherwise it was doomed to failure. Lenin, demanding that the real situation should always be considered, could not accept the categorical and schematic nature of Roy's conclusions.

Disagreements were especially acute on the attitude to Gandhi. According to Roy, Lenin believed that Gandhi—as the inspirer and leader of the anti-imperialist movement—objectively was playing a revolutionary role. In response Roy said that Indian nationalism of the "Gandhi school", being anti-imperialist, nonetheless was not objectively revolutionary, in so far as it denied the inevitability of capitalist development.<sup>3</sup>

Speaking on 26 July at the Congress plenary meeting Lenin said that "the backward countries can emerge from their present stage of development when the victorious proletariat of the Soviet Republics extends a helping hand to these masses and is in a position to give them support". He noted further that there had been fairly lively debates on that question in the Commission, particularly over Roy's theses: "The question was posed as follows: are we to consider as correct the assertion that the capitalist stage of economic development is inevitable for

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 149-50.

<sup>2</sup> Roy gave an absolutely wrong interpretation of Lenin's major thesis on the leading role of the international proletariat in the revolution as recognition of the eternal "civilising mission" of the Western peoples, as a call to the Western proletariat to take on the proverbial "White Man's Burden".

<sup>3</sup> See: *M. N. Roy's Memoirs*, p. 499.

backward nations now on the road to emancipation and among whom a certain advance towards progress is to be seen since the war? We replied in the negative."<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, Roy's Supplementary Theses in their original version objectively contained an affirmative reply to that question, essentially indicating the coming to power of communist parties in backward countries (at the given stage and not in the distant future), as the only possible alternative to capitalist development. Yet there were no objective conditions for realising that possibility.

We can now understand the context in which transition to socialism by "non-capitalist development" arose in the Commission's discussions. Roy, as is apparent from the cited facts, posed the questions as follows: support for bourgeois liberation movements in backward countries can lead only to the development of capitalism. The task of Communists, he felt, was not to back national-revolutionary forces, but immediately to organise mass communist parties relying on "movement of the masses" evidently independent of national-bourgeois elements, to "convert" this movement directly into a proletarian revolution, bypassing the bourgeois-democratic stage and, simultaneously, attaining national and social emancipation.

Lenin disagreed with this posing of the question and pointed out that other possibilities existed for bypassing capitalist development. In evidence Lenin cited the following: independent political activity and organisation of working and exploited people, as well as aid from the victorious proletariat, which was to have a decisive impact on world politics as its power consolidated in more and more countries.

Lenin formulated the thesis of the capitalist stage of development not being inevitable for backward countries in a report to the plenary meeting after discussion within the Commission. In substantiating this idea in regard to the radically new post-1917 world balance of forces, Lenin showed the oppressed peoples the real prospect of social emancipation.

The set of views held by Roy and other leftist revolutionaries of the time was essentially lacking in any prospect since it was founded on the idea that capitalist development of a colonial country could be interrupted only "by the coming to power of communist parties". But what would happen if the objective conditions for that had not matured in a country? According to Roy's logic, only the growth of capitalism could create such conditions. Ultimately, this dogmatic set of views objectively

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 244.



forced the communist parties of backward countries to choose between an opportunist encouragement of capitalist development or a reckless struggle for power in conditions of isolation and complete divorce from national-revolutionary anti-imperialist forces.

To back up such a concept, its author, naturally, had to distort the real situation—whether consciously or not; to overplay the influence of Communists, accordingly underplay the influence of national-revolutionary forces, to deny contradictions of the latter with imperialism, to ignore the weakness of the proletariat in the colonies and recognise as possible the appearance of petty-bourgeois (in composition and ideology) communist parties—which could in effect mean only “giving bourgeois-democratic liberation trends communist colours”, a “mere change of sign boards”. That meant that Roy did not take account of the world-historic changes brought into being by the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, which was a turning point in the development of the national liberation movement and united in a single stream the struggle of the proletariat and other revolutionary forces for socialism and the struggle against national and colonial oppression.

Adoption by the Comintern of the policy proposed by Roy could have had adverse consequences for the development of the world revolutionary process. Objectively, it would have led to isolating the national liberation movement from Soviet Russia, the vanguard of world revolution, and also from the working class of the advanced capitalist states, to renunciation of alliance with the national-revolutionary forces. Such a position would actually have denied the possibility of bypassing or interrupting capitalist development and would have prevented the establishment of a united anti-imperialist front. Lenin rejected this sectarian programme, and the Second Comintern Congress delegates understood and supported his position.

Displaying extreme tact and patience towards Roy, Lenin combined this with a principled and irreconcilable attack on petty-bourgeois distortion of the theory and practice of scientific socialism.

*Problems relating to discussion materials in the Second Congress Commission.* We cite below that part of the report on discussion within the Commission which contains a short minuted recording of Lenin's speech on 25 July 1920.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The report was published in *Vestnik 2-ogo kongressa Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala*, No. 1, 27 July 1920, pp. 1-2.

“The Commission on the National and Colonial Questions which discussed Comrade Lenin's theses on those questions heard reports of all Commission members: delegates from Korea, China, India, Persia, Bulgaria, Hungary, America and Britain. It would need an entire book to set out the content of those interesting reports...” Then followed the text of “Comrade Roy's report”. Roy said, in particular, that “the appeal of nationalists to fight for India's independence gained no response among the common people”; that “they are interested exclusively in questions of a socio-economic nature”. He noted also that, “by contrast with the rural proletariat, the industrial proletariat is fairly small in India; India has no more than up to five million workers...”

The Commission report notes further: “Elements exist in India for creating a strong communist party. But the revolutionary movement in India, since we are referring to broad popular support, has nothing in common with the national liberation movement.

“Basing himself on that analysis, Comrade Roy comes to the conclusion that the paragraph on the need for all communist parties to help the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in Eastern countries should be taken out from the eleventh thesis on the national question.<sup>1</sup> The Communist International should assist exclusively the creation and promotion of the communist movement in India, while the Communist Party of India should concern itself exclusively with organising wide sections of the people for fighting for their class interests.

“Comrade Roy defends the notion that the fate of the revolutionary movement in Europe utterly depends on the course of revolution in the East. Without the triumph of revolution in Eastern countries the communist movement in the West may be reduced to naught. World capitalism is deriving its major resources and its incomes from the colonies, largely in Asia. Driven to the extreme, European capitalists can give up the entire surplus value to the workers and thereby attract them to their side, killing their revolutionary aspirations, while the capitalists themselves will continue to exploit Asia with the help of the proletariat. This turn of events would be very advantageous to the capitalists. In view of this it is necessary to shift energy to promoting and raising the revolutionary movement in the East and adopting as the principal thesis the one stating that the fate of world communism depends on the triumph of communism in the East.”

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to “Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions”.



*Vestnik* reported that Lenin "disputed Roy's viewpoint". In reply to M. N. Roy, Lenin said, "In Russia we supported the liberal liberation movement when opposing tsarism. India's Communists are obliged to support the bourgeois-democratic movement without merging with it. Comrade Roy is going too far when he claims that the fate of the West depends exclusively on the extent of development and power of the revolutionary movement in Eastern countries. Despite the fact that India has only five million proletarians and 37 million landless peasants, Indian Communists have not succeeded yet in creating a communist party in the country and, if for no other reason, the views of Comrade Roy are largely unjustified."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin's speech was aimed against Roy's attempts to revise the theoretical, programme and tactical principles substantiated in the "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions".

The above-quoted material from the National and Colonial Commission shows that in his speech on 25 July 1920 Roy proceeded from the premise that there was nothing in common between the struggle for national independence and the social popular movement. That is why he proposed crossing out the first point of the eleventh thesis of Lenin's "Preliminary Draft", which made it incumbent on Communists to give support to the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in backward countries. Thereby Roy opposed also the fifth point of the same thesis. That point said, in particular, that the Comintern should make a temporary alliance with bourgeois democrats of the colonies and backward countries without merging with them. In other words, Roy consistently opposed Lenin's thesis on the need to unite all anti-imperialist forces.

The above-cited quotations from Lenin in the Second Congress Commission were designed to defend his idea of a united front of all anti-imperialist forces while retaining the independence of the proletarian (and communist) movement. In indicating the capitulation stance of part of the bourgeoisie in oppressed countries, Lenin saw the actual revolutionary nature of those non-proletarian forces to which Communists would give support as the necessary condition for an alliance of Communists with bourgeois-democratic liberation movements. The idea put forward at the Second Congress was of immense theoretical and practical significance: in the epoch of socialist

revolutions the national liberation movement is by no means relegated to the past, it does not become reactionary. On the contrary, a real possibility opens up before it in the new circumstances of joint revolutionary action with the countries of victorious proletariat, with communist parties.

Revolutionary experience has fully borne out the correctness of that approach and demonstrated how harmful it was to underestimate it. Now it is recognised as the most obvious law of development. But at that time, in 1920, it was a great scientific discovery. Lenin had to defend his viewpoint persistently against those who believed that the national liberation movement had already exhausted its revolutionary potential. The Second Comintern Congress rejected Roy's stand and adopted Lenin's idea of a united front between the working class and the non-proletarian anti-imperialist forces in the liberation movement of the oppressed peoples.<sup>1</sup> This was a victory for creative Marxism. Lenin noted that in his assessment of the revolutionary movement in Eastern countries Roy had gone "too far"; Lenin formulated the real state of affairs with exceptional exactitude. Without playing down the importance of the revolutionary movement in the East, Lenin's evaluation showed how wrong and impermissible it was to present it as the only force in anti-imperialist struggle.

Lenin stressed as far back as 1919: "...The socialist revolution will not be solely, or chiefly, a struggle of the revolutionary proletarians in each country against their bourgeoisie—no, it will be a struggle of all the imperialist-oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries, against international imperialism."<sup>2</sup> It follows that for him anti-imperialist struggle was neither predominantly "Western" or predominantly "Eastern". In approaching it from proletarian-class and internationalist positions, Lenin saw it as a combined world revolutionary process headed by the working class.

It was precisely Lenin who was first to indicate the

<sup>1</sup> For some time there was in circulation the idea that Lenin's theses were designed only for extremely backward countries, while Roy's theses, which were taken to have independent significance, dealt with the national-colonial question as applied to more developed dependencies and colonies. From Lenin's speech in the National and Colonial Commission it directly follows that the tactics of a united anti-imperialist front was insistently recommended by him for India as well, as a colony whose capitalist development had by 1920 reached a considerable level.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, November 22, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 159.

<sup>1</sup> *Vestnik 2-ogo kongressa Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala*, No. 1, 27 July 1920.



importance of the political awakening of the oppressed and exploited peoples of the East and of the "Eastern route" opening up before world revolution. At the same time, it was Lenin who was first to see the danger in announcing this route, essentially, as the only one. "...Any truth, if 'overdone' (as Dietzgen Senior put it)," Lenin wrote a few months before the Second Comintern Congress, "if exaggerated, or if carried beyond the limits of its actual applicability, can be reduced to an absurdity, and is even bound to become an absurdity under these conditions."<sup>1</sup>

The absolutising of the "Asian route" of world revolution made in Roy's speeches emanated from the same source that nurtured leftist tendencies opposed to Lenin's idea of uniting all anti-imperialist forces in the oppressed countries, from the residual petty-bourgeois voluntarist idea of the nature and course of the revolutionary process. This came largely from lack of faith in the proletariat of the oppressor countries which, in Roy's view, was achieving complete emancipation from exploitation not by means of revolutionary struggle against its "own" capitalists, but short of becoming their ally in colonial plunder. And this was being asserted at a time when the revolutionary workers of the European countries were storming the citadels of capitalism!

Roy's thesis about the exclusiveness of the "Asian route" of revolution could not, of course, find and did not find any support at the Congress. History had shown the complete correctness of Lenin's apprehensions in drawing serious attention to Roy's error. Adoption of Roy's line would have meant a tremendous setback to the world communist movement. His concepts obviously contained the outlines of a set of views and actions that were deeply alien to Marxism-Leninism.

Roy was also wrong about the tasks of the communist parties in the colonies and dependencies at the initial stage of the communist movement in the East. These tasks were set out by Lenin in his "Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East" on 22 November 1919. He said, "...Relying upon the general theory and practice of communism, you must adapt yourselves to specific conditions such as do not exist in the European countries; you must be able to apply that theory and practice to conditions

in which the bulk of the population are peasants, and in which the task is to wage a struggle against medieval survivals and not against capitalism. That is a difficult and specific task, but a very thankful one, because masses that have taken no part in the struggle up to now are being drawn into it, and also because the organisation of communist cells in the East gives you an opportunity to maintain the closest contact with the Third International. You must find specific forms for this alliance of the foremost proletarians of the world with the labouring and exploited masses of the East whose conditions are in many cases medieval."<sup>1</sup> So we see that Lenin included among the paramount tasks of Communists of the East the establishment of close mutual contact between the revolutionary movement in the East and the foremost proletarians of the whole world.

Roy and other leftists maintained that "organised socialist or communist parties already existed in most countries of the East" and that their tasks in all circumstances were to fight directly for socialist revolution. Leftists categorically opposed the idea that the Comintern should help the national liberation movement, and denied the very existence of the anti-imperialist aspect of nationalism. They effectively brought matters to a rift between the communist movement and the broad mass of working people in the backward countries, for whom the awakening of national awareness was only the first step towards active participation in politics.

Lenin attached prime importance to the formation and organisational-political strengthening of the proletarian vanguard in the oppressed countries, believing that the correct tactics would open up before the young communist parties of the East broad prospects in the fight for the masses, for leading positions in the liberation movement. At the same time, he did not pose the direct task of creating mass communist parties in relation even to the comparatively advanced countries of the East at the beginning of the 1920s, and he warned against artificially forcing that process.<sup>2</sup>

A fallacious conjecture has been advanced that in 1920 the Comintern subscribed to another viewpoint and that the text of the seventh, supplementary thesis adopted by the Congress said that "the prime and urgent task is to set up com-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Left-Wing Communism—an Infantile Disorder", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 62.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> See: R. A. Ulyanovsky, *National Liberation. Essays on Theory and Practice*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1979.



munist parties which would organise peasants and workers and lead them to revolution and the establishment of Soviet republics". From that thesis in the form in which it was published in 1934 (as, incidentally, also in several preceding publications), it followed that a resolution was approved, with Lenin's participation, stating that the establishment of communist parties was the prime and urgent task in the East—even then, in 1920; and here reference was not to some group of more advanced countries, but to the East as a whole ("in dependencies", "in backward countries", "in the colonies", in countries able to advance to communism, "bypassing the capitalist stage of development"). It would seem that the task of creating communist parties in the East in 1920 was set out just as it was in relation to countries of the capitalist West.

Yet it is well known that Lenin many times talked of the specific nature of the East. In backward countries, he emphasised, bearing in mind the East generally, precapitalist-feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant-relations prevail; because of that there is no, or almost no, industrial proletariat. During the Second Congress Lenin wrote (in "Remarks on the Report of A. Sultan-Zade Concerning the Prospects of a Social Revolution in the East"): "...Deduction: *adjust* both Soviet institutions and the Communist Party (its membership, special tasks) to the level of the *peasant* countries of the colonial East.

"This is the crux of the matter. This needs thinking about and *seeking concrete* answers."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin, let us recall, had mentioned that in all colonies and backward countries it was necessary to form "independent contingents of fighters and party organisations",<sup>2</sup> insisting on the independence of a proletarian movement even when it was still in its most embryonic form. Bearing in mind the specific and complex nature of the task of setting up communist parties in the East, he did not demand its immediate resolution; to take form and work successfully, communist parties needed certain objective and subjective prerequisites. In the Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions of 26 July, Lenin mentioned the need for a correct policy by proletarian parties in the East in relation to the

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Material for the Second Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 42, 1969, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Second Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 244.

peasantry, explaining, "if indeed they [proletarian parties—A.R.] can emerge in them."<sup>1</sup>

He was referring, of course, to specific conditions of the time. Lenin did not have the slightest doubt about the possibility and need for the emergence and organisation of communist parties in the East; at the same time, he oriented revolutionaries in the East who shifted to Marxist-Leninist positions on setting up communist parties where and when the objective and subjective conditions existed. If such conditions were lacking, the forced "creation" of communist parties would mean only the "dressing up" of the non-communist movement in "communist garb", against which Lenin emphatically and frequently warned.

In opposing forced establishment of communist parties, Lenin at the same time showed the way to form genuinely Marxist parties: reliance on the first fighters from the proletariat and insistence on independence of the communist movement from its very first steps. He then outlined the exceedingly important direction of activity for the communist parties of the East, related to work in the mass organisations of the working people.

When in November 1921, members of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party asked Lenin whether their party should become a communist party, Lenin said that they should not turn one party into another. The "conversion" of a people's revolutionary party into a communist party would be helped by the proletarian mass which still had to take shape in conditions of non-capitalist development. "A mere change of signboards is harmful and dangerous," he added.<sup>2</sup>

The Comintern followed Lenin's advice and undertook consistent and systematic work in shaping the communist movement in the East with account for the maturation of those objective and subjective prerequisites of the process that Lenin had indicated. The formation of Marxist-Leninist parties in the East, growth in their membership and influence, their conversion into a mighty force, were all successfully achieved during the formation of their proletarian "core" and, particularly, thanks to the realistic policy of the Comintern, based on Lenin's ideas, combining Marxism-Leninism with the labour movement of the oppressed countries, training communist

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Talk with a Delegation of the Mongolian People's Republic", *Collected Works*, Vol. 42, p. 361.



fighters, working out principal directions of communist strategy and tactics in the East together with them, orienting them on work within the mass organisations of the working people.

Bearing all that in mind, it is absolutely clear that Lenin in 1920 could not have advanced or approved the notion that the establishment of communist parties in the oppressed East (not in individual countries, but in the East generally!) was a prime task at the time.

But that is not all. The same edition of 1934 contains the conclusion, following the above-quoted sentence from the seventh, supplementary thesis (which talks of the "prime and urgent task"): "Thus, the masses in backward countries will be able to attain communism not through capitalist development, but under the leadership of the class-conscious proletariat of the advanced countries." What leaps to the eye is that the word "thus" in this context is senseless. If, as was asserted, the prime task of Communists in the East was to set up communist parties, under the leadership of which "peasants and workers" would establish Soviet power, does it follow logically *from that* that the masses in backward countries would come to communism under the leadership of the proletariat of the advanced countries? After all, Soviet government, established under the guidance of the communist party, was nothing other than the government of workers, the proletarian dictatorship. The strategic line of winning Soviet power under the leadership of *local communist parties* is not in itself grounds for concluding that the *proletariat of the advanced countries* would play the leading part in the transition of backward countries to communism.

The main point here, however, is that this strategic line of winning Soviet power in the East under the leadership of communist parties, and without reference to the need for an anti-imperialist stage of revolution, would be unrealistic, profoundly erroneous and would accord not with Lenin's, but with the leftist set of views that Lenin tirelessly opposed. The Commission working under Lenin's guidance could not place before the Comintern Congress a resolution which even indirectly recommended such a line.

Besides, reference was made to proletarian parties in the colonies in the *following* (eighth), supplementary thesis. Its original version said: "Organised socialist or communist parties already exist in most colonies, being in close relations with the mass movement," while the Congress-ratified

text referred to "organised revolutionary parties" which "*are striving* [my italics—A.R.] for close contact with the working masses".<sup>1</sup> This thesis noted that help from Western communist parties to the revolutionary movement in the colonies should be given through the proletarian parties of the colonies, but the task of forcing the establishment of such parties was definitely not set.

Lenin believed that at that time the most urgent task of Communists of the East was their work in the broad, mass organisations of the working people. In his report to the Congress plenary meeting of 26 July 1920 Lenin substantiated the possibility of the backward countries moving to socialism bypassing the capitalist stage of development, indicating as a vital condition of such a transition—along with help from the victorious proletariat—the possibility of and need for the awakening among the people of an aspiration for independent political activity and organisation, the creation of mass organisations of the working people. In that connection he stressed that "it is the absolute duty of Communist parties and of elements prepared to form Communist parties, everywhere to conduct propaganda in favour of peasants' Soviets or of working people's Soviets, this to include backward and colonial countries. Wherever conditions permit, they should at once make attempts to set up Soviets of the working people."<sup>2</sup> In that same report Lenin once again pointed to the duty of Communists to begin at once to work in that direction all over the world. Thus, the question of a non-capitalist path of development mentioned in the seventh, supplementary thesis, was, in Lenin's view, intimately associated with the setting up of mass political organisations of working people—"Soviets of the exploited". In the light of all this, it was natural to assume that in that part of the seventh, supplementary thesis referring to the immediate setting up of communist parties a mistake had crept in the 1934 edition of the document. What is more, one was bound to expect that this Congress-adopted thesis should have spoken of the political organisations of working people of the East, through which Communists would spread their influence among the people.

As a result of studying Congress materials and, in particular, the archive document—the text of the Congress resolution on the national and colonial questions—the assumption

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin i *Kommunistichesky Internatsional*, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 243.



that a mistake was made when translating and publishing the seventh, supplementary thesis has been substantiated. The text in actuality said that "the prime and urgent task is to set up *non-party* [my italics—A.R.] organisations of peasants and workers..." (The corrected Russian minutes of the Congress meeting say the setting up of "non-communist parties".)<sup>1</sup>

If we compare the seventh, supplementary thesis in its true version with the principal ideas voiced by Lenin in the report at the plenary meeting of 26 July, we see that they fully coincide. Lenin, as well as the Comintern, then regarded the main and urgent task of Communists in their work with the peoples of oppressed countries wholly to be the creation of national-revolutionary mass organisations of working people, "non-party organisations" which would in a way be the practical application of the "idea of Soviet organisation" in precapitalist conditions. Lenin regarded that task as the "unqualified duty" of communist parties and those people who were ready to set up such parties, and he insisted that Communists should *straightaway* tackle the problem.<sup>2</sup>

Lenin understood the establishment and activity of "non-communist organisations" of a revolutionary nature not as an alternative to the setting up and activity of communist parties. Both he and the Comintern regarded those organisations as allies of the communist parties in the fight against imperialism and for the overthrow of capitalism. It is on such principles that the international communist movement stands today.<sup>3</sup>

Trotskyites tried to divert the Comintern from the Leninist positions. Trotsky constantly opposed the Comintern policy of encouraging the creation of non-communist revolutionary organisations and an alliance with them; in particular, he

<sup>1</sup> In the book *V. I. Lenin i Kommunistichesky Internatsional*, published in 1970 by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the text of the seventh thesis is given in accordance with the archive document.

<sup>2</sup> In that connection the Soviet historian R. A. Ulyanovsky draws attention to the fact that the prime task of Communists was given as the setting up of mass organisations of working people in the countries of the East. These mass organisations, which were not yet communist, could acquire, as the Comintern justly felt, a popular, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist nature; their emergence was therefore seen in direct association with the possibility of development "bypassing capitalism" (see: *The Communist Parties of the Developing Countries in the Struggle for a United Front*, Nauka, Moscow, 1976, p. 6, in Russian).

<sup>3</sup> On Lenin's views on the path of development of the communist movement in the colonies and dependencies and on the importance of mass anti-imperialist organisations, see also R. A. Ulyanovsky, *National Liberation. Essays on Theory and Practice*.

sharply condemned the idea of forming and supporting worker-peasant parties. His actions grew out of the notion of a "permanent revolution", which in essence denied the united front policy. He tried to "prove the fallaciousness" of the Comintern principle of aid in forming worker-peasant parties in the East, resorting to outright distortion: the Comintern, he claimed, was "substituting" those non-communist mass organisations for communist parties. He wrote, in particular, that a worker-peasant party could be only a "base, a screen, a springboard for the bourgeoisie". Trotsky slanderously maintained that in its policy towards worker-peasant parties the Comintern was following reformism. To support that statement he referred to leaders of European social-democracy most of whom believed the Bolsheviks were wrong in fighting against the Socialist-Revolutionaries and insistently recommended a merger of the two parties. The distortion is blatant: when the Comintern advocated setting up and supporting revolutionary worker-peasant parties, it did so on the basis of its principled attitude to non-communist revolutionary organisations, seeing in them allies of the communist parties and striving therefore to strengthen the latter, consolidate their independence and extend their mass influence; opportunists were recommending the liquidation of revolutionary social-democracy in Russia, its merger with the Socialist-Revolutionaries into a single party. The traditional Trotskyite tendency lay behind the fuss about the "impermissibility" of setting up and supporting worker-peasant parties, behind the "concern" for communist parties which the Comintern was supposed to be ready to sacrifice to the non-communist organisations; the intention was to undermine the communist parties' policy of a united anti-imperialist front and thereby cause irreparable damage to them.

Predictions that the national liberation movement in the colonies and dependencies was doomed to disintegrate and swiftly die, and together with it (and, moreover, precisely in connection with it) the attempts to "dress it up" as communism caused disquiet to Lenin. He warned against the danger of communist elements dissolving in the broad democratic liberation stream. Lenin considered it vitally important "under all circumstances" to "uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form".<sup>1</sup> In putting forward the idea of a united front, he

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 150.



at the same time believed that *under no circumstances* should Communists give up struggle for leadership of revolution, otherwise they would turn into an appendage of bourgeois democracy.

Lenin's principled and irreconcilable fight against sectarian distortions on national and colonial issues was a struggle to create genuine communist parties in the countries of the East, a struggle for their correct tactics corresponding to the specific conditions and ensuring close relations with the common people.

The concept which is here called "Roy's set of views" did not appear out of thin air. Such ideas were fairly widespread in the young communist movement of countries in the East, and Roy only formulated them most succinctly. The reasons have to be sought in the specific-historical situation that was taking shape in the colonies and semi-colonies after the October Revolution in Russia, in certain peculiarities of the formation of the communist movement in those countries.

The ideas of the October Revolution had a powerful impact on the progressive forces of the countries of the East. The national liberation struggle, the class actions of the workers and peasants reached a high point. In such circumstances a communist vanguard was steadily being established and growing stronger ideologically and organisationally.

Many eminent leaders of communist parties and groups in the East started as revolutionary nationalists. As a result of the diffident, inconsistent policy of the national-bourgeois forces, such leaders gained the impression that national liberation movements were utterly futile. They therefore drew the conclusion that political impression could be won only through a socialist revolution which they imagined as the *direct* task of communist parties in all countries from the moment they appeared. Coming to Marxism under the influence of a patriotic impulse and not being ready to comprehend it as a scientific set of views, these leaders, of whom Roy was a typical example, often were unable to shed their petty-bourgeois ideology completely. In addition, the view was widespread in some young communist parties of the colonies that since communism was the embodiment of the working people's ideals the announcement of its principal ideas would somehow in itself automatically attract hundreds of millions of people to the side of the Communists.

The "infantile disorder" of leftism was also manifest in the communist movement of the West at that time. As in the West,

so in the East, the main mistake of the leftists was that they took "*their desire*, their politico-ideological attitude, for objective reality." They regarded what was obsolete *to them* as something obsolete *to the masses*.<sup>1</sup> The experience of the Russian Bolshevik Party was often studied and applied in a one-sided way. The leftists in the West saw the main thing in that the Bolsheviks had made a revolution, resolutely fighting against petty-bourgeois parties; the leftists in the East saw the main thing in that the Russian liberal bourgeoisie had become an overtly counter-revolutionary force and that the democratic transformations in Russia had become possible only through the victory of the socialist revolution.

Lenin's book "*Left-Wing*" Communism—an Infantile Disorder, written not long before the Second Congress, became for Communists everywhere a source of Bolshevik experience and served as a warning against its one-sided study and application. Particularly important for the Communists of the East was Lenin's notion that the Bolsheviks in the specific circumstances of Russia did not reject support for the liberal bourgeoisie against tsarism, being able at the same time to wage an uncompromising ideological and political struggle against bourgeois liberalism and the slightest manifestation of its influence within the labour movement.

After the Second Comintern Congress Lenin continued to work on theoretical problems and practical tasks connected with the relationship between the revolutionary proletariat and the national liberation movements.

In his article "The Second Congress of the Communist International" (August-September 1920), Lenin felt it necessary to say, "The revolutionary movement in the advanced countries would in fact be nothing but a sheer fraud if, in their struggle against capital, the workers of Europe and America were not closely and completely united with the hundreds upon hundreds of millions of 'colonial' slaves, who are oppressed by that capital."<sup>2</sup>

In July 1921, speaking of the colonies, Lenin noted that "they cannot help us yet".<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless he clearly saw the prospects ahead: "Now every day of the awakening of life and

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Left-Wing' Communism—an Infantile Disorder", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 271.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Third Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 491.



struggle of new classes in the East (Japan, India, and China)—i. e., the hundreds of millions of human beings who form the greater part of the world population and whose historical passivity and historical torpor have hitherto conditioned the stagnation and decay of many advanced European countries—every day of the awakening to life of new peoples and new classes serves as a fresh confirmation of Marxism.”<sup>1</sup> In his last works (in particular “The Question of Nationalities or ‘Autonomisation’” and “Better Fewer, but Better”) Lenin again drew attention to the need resolutely and consistently to defend the internationalist positions. He stressed that when Communists even on minor points adopt imperialist attitudes towards oppressed nationalities, they thereby undermine “all our principled sincerity, all our principled defence of the struggle against imperialism.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Asia with its hundreds of millions of people was “to follow us on to the stage of history in the near future.”<sup>3</sup> Prophetically he forecast that “the morrow of world history will be a day when the awakening peoples oppressed by imperialism are finally aroused and the decisive long and hard struggle for their liberation begins.”<sup>4</sup> Lenin gave enormous importance to the anti-imperialist struggle of the “revolutionary and nationalist East” for the destinies of the world socialist revolution, for the destinies of Soviet power in Russia.<sup>5</sup> As regards the outcome of the struggle, that would depend ultimately on the fact that Russia, India, China, and other Asian countries, comprised an enormous majority of the people of the world. “And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured.”<sup>6</sup>

So we see that Lenin’s set of views on the national and national-colonial issues contained a summary of all the vast changes, that had taken place in the world during wartime and, in particular, after the October 1917 Revolution. Presented

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “On the Significance of Militant Materialism”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, “The Question of Nationalities or ‘Autonomisation’”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 36, p. 611.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 610.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 611.

<sup>5</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, “Better Fewer, but Better”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, pp. 499-500.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 500.

in the pithy and general form of the “Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions” at the Second Comintern Congress and in his speeches at that Congress, it is a summary of the whole previous study which was carried out by Lenin in the closest theoretical interrelationship with other aspects of analysis of the laws in the epoch of imperialism and socialist transformation of the world, and with the most precise account for the changes that had taken place in objective reality.

Lenin made his analysis of the national liberation movements and the policy of the revolutionary proletariat towards them relying on the basic tenets of Marxism, on proletarian internationalism and the class struggle of workers. It took him long years of practical experience, painstaking study and theoretical analysis to create a set of ideas consonant with the major socio-economic and political trends in the changed world. His ideas were to become an effective weapon of communist parties which launched their activity in the epoch opened up by the October Revolution, combining Marxism-Leninism with the international workers movement. Lenin’s teaching on national and national-colonial questions, his evaluation of the balance of principal socio-political forces in the world (including the national liberation movement), and his principles in regard to the national liberation movements constituted the theoretical and ideological-political basis of the entire practical activity of the Comintern in relation to the oppressed countries.

If we were to try and formulate concisely the importance of Lenin’s ideas for the strategy and tactics on the national-colonial issue, it might be as follows: a policy of alliances and blocs with all anti-imperialist forces, and primarily with the peasantry, given the invariable condition of retaining the independence of the communist and workers movement throughout the epoch of transition to socialism on a world scale.

### 3. LENIN’S IDEAS AND THE COMINTERN

At the end of June 1920 a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) and a group of Second Congress delegates adopted a decision to call the First Congress of the Peoples of the East. The ECCI saw the coming congress as an important event destined to encourage the establishment of unity among the working people of the West and the oppressed peoples of the East. Lenin’s colleagues, Y. D. Stasova and G. K. Ordzhonikidze, did much for arranging the congress.



The congress took place in September in Baku. As many as 1,891 delegates, 1,273 of whom were Communists, took part in its work. There were 37 nationalities present—from the Caucasus, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Egypt, India, Iran, China, Korea, Turkey, Japan and elsewhere. Further, envoys from communist parties of Europe and America arrived in Baku; they included Béla Kun (Hungary), Thomas Quelch (Britain) and John Reed (USA). They brought the peoples of the East greetings from the revolutionary proletariat of their countries. Members of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Comintern Executive Committee also participated in the work of the congress.

Having examined the national-colonial question—the Bolshevik orientalist M.P. Pavlovich (Veltman) read a report—the congress expressed agreement with Lenin's theses adopted by the Second Comintern Congress. The congress also discussed Soviet construction in the East. Although there was a certain "running ahead" in the corresponding theses adopted by the congress, their main idea, in determining the positive significance of the theses, was that the oppressed peoples of the East could count on the support of the Communist International and the Soviet states. It also examined proposals on the agrarian issue. In the document adopted on this point of the agenda, the congress oriented the peasants on anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution, in dividing up the landowners' land, transferring the landowners' stock to the peasants' collective ownership, and nationalisation of the land. The idea permeated the theses that the winning of political independence by the countries of the East, while the capitalist system remained intact, would not free the peasants from oppression. Therefore, the peasants had to fight for the overthrow of "their" landowners and "their" bourgeoisie. And in that struggle there was no other way but struggle against the oppressors jointly with the advanced revolutionary workers of the West and in close alliance with the revolutionary Soviet republics.

At the First Congress of the Peoples of the East representatives of the oppressed peoples of the East announced the community of their interests and those of the revolutionary proletariat in the fight against international imperialism, and demonstrated a will to unite around the Land of the Soviets. This response by the foremost representatives of peoples of the East to the ideas raised by the Communist International was a vivid testimony to their vitality. The con-

gress set up a Council for Propaganda and Action of the Peoples of the East, which issued the first number of the periodical *Narody Vostoka*, published a verbatim report of the congress, and translated its decisions into many oriental languages. The council existed until early 1922 and carried on considerable propaganda work.

The Comintern Executive Committee considered the Baku congress a sort of supplement to the Second Comintern Congress. The editorial of *Narody Vostoka* said: "The Second Congress that had gathered in Moscow in 1920 finally united and bound in a single iron organisation all the revolutionary masses of the West European proletariat and poor peasantry advancing to fight for the immediate overthrow of the capitalist yoke. The Congress of the Peoples of the East supplemented that unity, attracting to it also the multitudes of peasants of the countries of the East, the millions of working people of all backward colonies and semi-colonies."<sup>1</sup> As M. P. Pavlovich, one of the organisers of the congress, put it, delegates to the congress pledged to promote class self-awareness among the many millions of people, to help them in the struggle not only against foreign, but also against their own exploiters, to awaken in the common people an urge to independent political thought and independent political activity, as Lenin taught, and to organise them around the peasant councils (Soviets), the councils of working and exploited people.

The idea of unity of interests of the oppressed peoples of the East and the workers of the entire world ran like a red thread through speeches by leading figures of the Comintern and representatives of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) at the First Congress of the Peoples of the East. The speeches explained, in particular, that only the world bourgeoisie saw in the peoples of the East "the hordes of Genghiz Khan" which presented a "terrible threat" to European culture. Communists considered them as allies and brothers of the international proletariat which would build a new society together with them.

The main merit of the congress was that it did a great deal of work in popularising the decisions of the Second Congress, its ideas of an alliance between the proletarian West and the oppressed East. This idea found expression in the slogan proclaimed at the congress "Workers of all countries and all oppressed peoples, unite!". On the completion of congress work, Lenin said, "We now stand, not only as re-

<sup>1</sup> *Narody Vostoka*, October 1920, No. 1, p. 4.



representatives of the proletarians of all countries but as representatives of the oppressed peoples as well." Some comrades asked Lenin whether the slogan "Workers of all countries and all oppressed peoples, unite!" meant that it was replacing the old "Workers of all countries, unite!" which Marx and Engels had advanced in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Lenin replied that the putting forward of a new slogan was correct and not in the least contradictory from the standpoint of the current policy.<sup>1</sup>

In January 1921 the Executive Committee of the Communist International examined Roy's report on the political situation in India. Roy acquainted the Committee especially with the activity of the Indian National Congress.

Among those who spoke was Iranian Communist Sultan-Zadeh. He proposed dropping the name "communist" when referring to the communist parties of the East, maintaining that there were no grounds for using it. Sultan-Zadeh actually tried to undermine the task of forming communist parties in the East, which Lenin had set (in particular in his "Remarks on the Report of A. Sultan-Zadeh Concerning the Prospects of a Social Revolution in the East"). Several participants in the discussion opposed Sultan-Zadeh's proposal. The best-argued objection was that of the eminent Comintern Executive Committee member Eugen Varga. He pointed to the process of industrialisation going on in the Eastern countries, to the fact that a proletariat had begun to take shape there, and drew attention to the maturing of objective conditions for the emergence and development of a communist vanguard in the East.

More and more frequently the ECCI was turning to problems of the East. When they came to the Comintern, members of Eastern communist organisations made their proposals and took an active part in discussions. Of course, many of their proposals were not yet sufficiently mature—after all, they were being made by revolutionaries who had only just turned to communism. The report "On the Plan for Revolution and Cultural and Educational Work of the Section of Chinese Communists Attached to the Russian Communist Party" presented to the Second Congress, said that the central organising bureau of the Chinese Communists attached to the Central Committee of the Russian

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Speech Delivered at a Meeting of Activists of the Moscow Organisation of the R.C.P.(B.), December 6, 1920", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 452-53; *The Second Congress of the Comintern. The Elaboration of Ideological, Tactical and Organisational Principles of Communist Parties*, Politizdat, Moscow, 1972, p. 191 (in Russian).

Communist Party (Bolsheviks) was proposing to call a congress of Chinese workers. The bureau was intending to appeal to Chinese workers both within China itself and in other countries, calling upon them to rally "the mighty forces of four hundred million people". They suggested uniting with "the forces of the even more oppressed three hundred million people of India". Once drawn into the movement, the people would be "invincible in their spontaneous victorious advance which could end only in the establishment of a World Socialist Federative Republic; the latest date for the organisation of that Republic is set at 1 January 1927".<sup>1</sup> What a fascinating document! It contains both faith in the mighty power of one's own people, and an aspiration to unite the forces of the Chinese and Indian peoples, and an intention to take the path shown by Soviet Russia. Of course, the "setting" by the young revolutionaries of China of an exact date for implementing a "world socialist revolution" ("6 years, 3 months and 3 weeks") should not be sneered at. After all, these people were the first Chinese Communists. The document shows at the same time what an enormous amount the young Chinese Communists had still to do in order to acquire at least the minimum of theoretical maturity.

Such was the stand of people who had only just begun to assimilate the ideas of communism. It would be unjust simply to call this stand erroneous; it represented the sincere fervour of the oppressed for communism and the Bolsheviks, in whom they saw the saviours and deliverers of the oppressed peoples of the world.

But there were also people adhering to profoundly erroneous views and attempting to foist them upon the Comintern. Thus, on 5 August 1919, Trotsky sent a letter to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) with a proposal for a radical change in the Party's international policy. He asserted that it was necessary to advance to the forefront what had yesterday been in the background. He suggested turning to face the East, understanding by that the incursion of the Red Army into the East, claiming that such an act would cause the immediate insurrection of the people in oppressed countries and would ensure victory for communism in Asia. He recommended despatching a specially formed cavalry corps to India, and to form a "political or military headquarters of the Asian revolution" in the Urals or in

<sup>1</sup> *The Second Congress of the Comintern. The Elaboration...*, p. 24.



Turkestan. The "headquarters", Trotsky announced, could be much more effective than the Comintern. So Trotsky believed that the centre of the world revolutionary movement had shifted eastwards where all the conditions for revolution had matured. This view in no way corresponded to reality. With utmost clarity he spelled out in his letter the idea of "exporting revolution"—an idea that was deeply alien to Marxism-Leninism. In actual fact, Trotsky was proposing the liquidation of the Communist International and its replacement by a "headquarters of the Asian revolution". The Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Comintern gave a sharp rebuff to his reckless ideas.

It was 1921, a little more than three years had passed since the Great October Socialist Revolution. Revolutionary skirmishes were still taking place in Europe. The East, stirred up by the October Revolution, had launched its forces into an anti-imperialist struggle. And the Communist International was in the vanguard of the revolutionary forces of the whole world. Leninism had become its powerful weapon. The Comintern had now a vast amount of work to be done in the East as envisaged by the world strategy of the communist movement.

As it went about its practical activity, the Comintern also, under Lenin's direct leadership and basing itself on the Second Congress decisions, continued to elaborate the theoretical principles of its policy in regard to the national liberation movements of the oppressed peoples.

The national-colonial question became an object of discussion at the Third Comintern Congress, held between June and July 1921. This Congress gathered in a situation which Lenin, referring to the alignment of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces in the world, called "an unstable equilibrium".<sup>1</sup> To understand the place of the Eastern question in the work of the Congress we have to have a general outline of the socio-political situation. By the time the Congress met, Soviet Russia had strengthened its positions by defeating foreign intervention and the White Guards. On the other hand, however, in many European countries the revolutionary actions of the proletariat had suffered a setback. For example, the movement of workers in Northern Italy to seize factories in September 1920 had ended in failure. The general strike

in Czechoslovakia in December 1920 had been crushed. In March 1921 armed clashes took place in Central Germany between proletarian brigades and government troops ending in heavy defeat for the workers. The general strike between March and July 1921 of British coal miners culminated in retreat by the miners who were forced to accept the owners' terms. In conditions of the world economic crisis of 1921-22 the bourgeoisie everywhere was pressing on the working class, trying to deprive it of its gains. Bourgeois governments in their desire to stabilise the capitalist system enlisted the support of right-wing social-democratic leaders afraid of revolution and proletarian dictatorship. Meanwhile, the Social-Democrats possessed considerable political power (social-democratic and socialist parties had some 8 million members in 1921, and reformist trade unions about 22 million).

Already in December 1920 Lenin believed that the rate of development of revolution in capitalist countries was slowing down and one ought not to count on "this tempo becoming rapid".<sup>1</sup> In 1921 a marked ebb in the revolutionary wave was taking place, although there were still no grounds for claiming that world capitalism had achieved a more or less prolonged stability.

Within revolutionary periods there can be "breaks" and "lulls" that alternate with fresh powerful explosions of workers' political activity. The Comintern, as well as Lenin, was far from altering the strategic guideline of the international communist movement for socialist revolution. But preparations for revolution had to be made in the new conditions differently than hitherto. The Comintern called for a united workers front, with workers consolidating their ranks in the fight against capital and advancing transitional and partial demands. The elaboration of tactics corresponding to the new circumstances occupied a particularly important place in the activity of Lenin and the Comintern. Lenin resolutely opposed the proponents of the so-called theory of offensive, who considered that communist parties should resort to armed struggle in all circumstances, irrespective of the objective conditions.

Examination of the Eastern questions by the Comintern Executive Committee in preparation for the Third Comintern

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Third Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 479.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech Delivered at a Meeting of Activists of the Moscow Organisation of the R.C.P.(B.), December 6, 1920", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 442.



Congress began in February 1921, soon after M. N. Roy had presented his new report on India to the ECCI. In the course of discussion of the Indian question by the ECCI on 23 February 1921 Roy doubted whether the Comintern was giving enough importance to the proletarian character of the popular movement in India, which was a "real power of the working class", a movement of an "actual proletarian-revolutionary character". Then the Indian question was discussed by the commission, on behalf of which Eugen Varga spoke at a meeting of the Executive Committee on 17 March. From what he said it was apparent that the commission supported certain of Roy's erroneous conclusions. However, most Executive Committee members rejected, on the whole, the leftist formulations. The Committee also decided to include "a representative of non-communist elements, who were in close touch with the broad sections of the working people", in the Tashkent Office which the Comintern had set up.

Roy presented his Draft Theses on the Oriental Question to the Third Congress. In preparing the Draft Roy had no doubt taken account of the fact that Lenin had criticised leftists with particular sharpness in the new situation. Roy wrote in the Draft that "European capitalism is still holding its own against the increasingly powerful attack of the proletariat in the Western countries, ... capitalism, as a world-domineering factor, has not yet reached such a state of decay that its immediate downfall is inevitable".<sup>1</sup> Roy had obviously heeded to some extent the criticism of his Supplementary Theses made by the Second Congress commission in 1920. In particular, he no longer accentuated the revolutionary role of the working people of the East *as counterposed* to the revolutionary role of the proletariat of the countries of the West in his new 1921 Draft.

At the same time, Roy focused attention on the "most advanced non-European countries". Here lay the tactical ploy with which he had tried to urge the Comintern to revise its conclusions on the national-colonial question. "The point of view that the peoples of the East," he wrote, "can be reckoned as one and the same unit with identical problems to solve, is erroneous."<sup>2</sup> We may note that Lenin, as well as the Comintern, had never regarded the peoples of the East as "one and the same unit", and the Second Congress

had proceeded from the notion that the peoples of the East were being subjected to imperialist foreign exploitation and it was for that reason that they differed from the peoples of the metropolitan countries. Having noted that the peoples of the East differed in level of social and economic development, Roy concluded in his Draft: "Therefore a certain definite line of policy and tactics cannot be laid down to be followed rigidly in all Eastern countries." He was referring here to the guideline approved by the Second Congress of supporting national liberation movements in the East while strictly retaining and defending the independence of the proletarian movement. Then Roy turned to India. As a result of the relatively high level of capitalist development in India, the local bourgeoisie, Roy maintained, could no longer be considered a force inimical to imperialism. In other countries of the East, he went on, the influence of feudal and clerical elements was still considerable (this was a "concession" to the Second Congress decisions), but in India there was a rapid industrialisation and growth of the proletariat's socio-political might. Therefore, he wrote, the revolutionary movement in India no longer rested on "the petty-bourgeois sentimental nationalism". This was, in fact, the conclusion which Lenin had struck out of Roy's Supplementary Theses during preparations for the Second Congress.

Roy could not, of course, oppose all the decisions of the Second Comintern Congress. He was obliged to admit in his Draft that "in India and other countries of the same political and economic condition, the liberal bourgeoisie, which stands at the front of the national democratic movement, is a revolutionary factor in so far as it carries on its historic struggle against the imperial ruler for the right of exploiting the native resources and native labour".<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, he expressed the opinion that a weak local bourgeoisie could possibly become an ally of imperialism. From these notions which were not new and could not evince objections at the Congress, Roy made, however, the categorical conclusion that "in India ... it has not been practicable to unify the entire people, or at least a sufficiently large part of it, in a movement for political liberation on the basis of bourgeois nationalism".<sup>2</sup> This assertion was simply unrealistic and flatly contradicted Lenin's conclusions on the

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Roy, *Draft Theses on the Oriental Question*, p. 1

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



national-colonial question, and was confounded by the course of historical events.

Iranian Communist Sultan-Zadeh also presented Draft Theses on the Oriental Question to the Third Comintern Congress. In his view the colonial countries were "proletarian countries". He wrote that the attitude of the ruling state to a dependency was very similar to the attitude of a factory owner to his workers in bourgeois society, with just the important difference that part of surplus value was going into the pocket of the native bourgeoisie. Sultan-Zadeh's views, which were close to those of Roy, fundamentally differed from those of Lenin. Lenin's viewpoint assumed concerted action by the proletarians of imperialist countries and the working people of the East, which could certainly not be said about Sultan-Zadeh's idea which attributed the role of "world proletariat" to the oppressed peoples of the East. As far as the "native bourgeoisie" was concerned, Sultan-Zadeh maintained that it was contending with the yoke of the European capitalists and involving in the struggle wide sections of the people acting under its guidance. He concluded that the economic interests of the bourgeoisie, artisans, workers and peasants "inevitably push them into a desperate struggle against world capitalism for complete national emancipation".

The theses presented by Sultan-Zadeh, like Roy's Draft, although testifying to the influence of Second Congress decisions, far from accorded with them in everything. It may be that this was a reason why the Third Congress and its Commission on Oriental Questions did not deem it necessary to adopt a new document on national-colonial questions. The major reason, however, was that no far-reaching events had occurred in the East between the two Comintern congresses that would call for a review of those questions less than a year after the Second Congress.

The importance of the Third Comintern Congress consisted precisely in that it formulated the need to change from a direct revolutionary onslaught on world capitalism to a siege of it, to drawing the majority of workers to the side of the communist parties, as well as giving a decisive rebuff to leftist views. The key slogan advanced by the Third Congress was "Go to the People!". But the recommendations the Second Congress had addressed to the Communists of the East a year previously essentially expressed that idea already. The offensive against the leftist deviation among the Communists of the East was already begun at the Second Comintern

Congress—a year before the views of leftist elements in Western communist parties were criticised at the Third Congress.

During the work of the Third Congress, its delegates often dealt with the Eastern question. It was debated on 12 June 1921. Tom Mann, representing British Communists, spoke convincingly about the fruits of colonial exploitation being enjoyed only by a "tiny handful of British subjects".<sup>1</sup> British Communists, he said, were bending all their efforts to liberate British workers and striving as well to liberate the oppressed peoples. "But the narrow nationalist movement could never be strong enough to deal with the ubiquitous world plutocracy; therefore our greatest desire is to encourage, on a healthy revolutionary basis, the labour movement among each of those enslaved peoples so as it could develop everywhere and do so independently, in line with the prevailing national conditions, and become part of the world revolutionary movement."<sup>2</sup>

The representative of the Communist Party of Iran, Aga-Zadeh, talked of the national liberation movement in his country; he began his speech by saying that he recognised as "exhaustive" the theses on the national-colonial question adopted at the Second Comintern Congress.<sup>3</sup> Representatives of Azerbaijanian, Georgian and Armenian Communists also made speeches largely of an informative nature. Zhang Tailei made a brief speech on the communist movement in China, in particular saying that young Chinese revolutionaries were at the crossroads; they needed assistance and had to "be led to communism". Zhang Tailei drew attention to the anarchist and reformist danger existing within the young revolutionary groups in China. On the subject of the Chinese lumpen proletariat the speaker said that it could be attracted to the side of the revolution; it would be very dangerous to leave lumpen proletarians to themselves, enabling world capitalism to recruit them and force them to fight against the proletariat.<sup>4</sup>

Lenin's "Report on the Tactics of the R.C.P., July 5" summed up the attitude of the Communist International to

<sup>1</sup> *III Vsemirny kongress Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala*, Verbatim Report, Petrograd, 1922, p. 462.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 465.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473.



the national liberation movement. He began his Report with a description of the international situation. Noting the existence of a certain equilibrium in the international situation, he said, "It must be emphasised, of course, that this is only a relative equilibrium, and a very unstable one."<sup>1</sup> Lenin added that in both the capitalist countries and the colonies and semi-colonies a great deal of inflammable material was accumulating: "It is quite possible, therefore, that insurrections, great battles and revolutions may break out there sooner or later, and very suddenly too."<sup>2</sup> The part of his report referring to the international situation ended with an analysis of the situation in the colonies. He showed that it would be wrong to regard the liberation struggle in the colonies as "an insignificant national and totally peaceful movement".<sup>3</sup> He went on to say: "It has undergone great change since the beginning of the twentieth century: millions and hundreds of millions, in fact the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe, are now coming forward as independent, active and revolutionary factors."<sup>4</sup> Here Lenin, who always warned against any exaggeration of the revolutionary role of the East, was again drawing attention to its real revolutionary role. Further, he made this prophesy: "It is perfectly clear that in the impending decisive battles in the world revolution, the movement of the majority of the population of the globe, initially directed towards national liberation, will turn against capitalism and imperialism and will, perhaps, play a much more revolutionary part than we expect."<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile the tide of the revolutionary movement was falling both in the West and in the East. This was the situation in which the Fourth Comintern Congress met from November to December 1922. The Congress examined the report of its Executive Committee, discussed Lenin's report "Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution", the question of the offensive of capital and fascism, as well as questions of the East, the Comintern programme, etc. It advanced the slogan of a workers government, but indicated several types of such

government seen as forms of transition to proletarian dictatorship.

Several delegates spoke on the Eastern question, among them M. N. Roy and Sen Katayama. Roy recognised that "the Second Comintern Congress worked out the general principles of tactics in the fight for national liberation in the colonies and semi-colonies", but added that it was necessary to specify the political course adopted, because since the Second Congress two years had passed and a differentiated approach ought to be made to the Eastern countries. Roy elucidated, "We established that, only because they were politically, economically and socially backward could they all be grouped together, as a single general problem. But it was a mistaken view. At present we know that we cannot regard the Eastern countries as a homogeneous whole either politically, or economically, or socially."

That was an outright distortion, in so far as the Comintern had never held such views. Although further on Roy expounded the view that largely corresponded to the Second Congress line, the above-quoted passage provided him with an opportunity for demanding a revision, at a convenient moment, of Lenin's tactics on the national-colonial question. That was the idea that Lenin's theses were applicable only to the most backward of the colonies and that the class struggle in the East was developing so rapidly that an ever-increasing number of countries was going beyond the bounds of that group. What is more, Roy expressed the opinion that recognition by the non-proletarian anti-imperialist forces of communist party leadership was supposed to be a necessary precondition for setting up a united front in the East.<sup>1</sup>

Sen Katayama's report was devoted mainly to questions of the revolutionary and workers movement in Japan. He said, in part, "On the initiative of Soviet Russia and the Comintern ... we have held a Far Eastern Conference at which we established a united front."<sup>2</sup> He had in mind the Congress of the Peoples of the Far East that had taken place during January and February 1922, and which had had representatives from China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, India, Mongolia and the peoples of Siberia. The Congress noted in one of its decisions the need for a proper

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Third Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 478.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 478-79.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 481.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 481-82.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 482.

<sup>1</sup> For Roy's report see: *Bulleten IV kongressa Kommunisticheskogo Internationala*, No. 19, 1 December 1922, pp. 22-27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.



understanding of relations between the national revolutionary movements, on the one hand, and the struggle of working people for their social emancipation, on the other, believing that only in alliance with the international proletariat could the imperialist-enslaved working people of the Far East attain their national and social liberation.

The Eastern Commission of the Fourth Comintern Congress drew up Theses on the Eastern Question, which were a further elaboration of Lenin's ideas with account for the two-year experience of revolutionary struggle. The commission based itself on the decisions of the Second Comintern Congress, rejecting the leftist notions contained on Roy's report. The Congress noted the rapid growth of the national liberation movement in many countries, as well as the formation in several of them of communist parties. It also noted the fact of "the awakening of the labour movement" in the East. A special section of the theses was called "Conditions of the Struggle", which said that bourgeois democracy was finding it hard and slow to stand aloof from feudal-bureaucratic elements, and these elements were becoming abettors of imperialist rule. The theses expressed the idea that the main task of national-revolutionary movements in the East at that stage—attainment of national independence—could be resolved only if broad sections of the working people join those movements, if those movements were fully to break with reactionary-feudal elements and embody popular social demands in their programme. "While being completely aware that the will of a nation for political independence in varying historical conditions can be expressed by the most diverse classes," the theses said, "the Communist International supports all national revolutionary movements against imperialism. At the same time, it does not lose sight of the fact that only a consistent revolutionary line of policy based on the active support of the masses, and the unreserved break with all advocates of compromise with imperialism in the interests of maintaining class domination, can lead the oppressed masses to victory."<sup>1</sup> The theses gave special significance to the agrarian question; it noted that the anti-feudal struggle in the oppressed countries was acquiring also a character of a national liberation struggle. Moreover, the relationships between

the local bourgeoisie and the big feudal and feudal-bourgeois landowners was taken note of. That explained, the document said, the half-way policy of the bourgeois leaders of nationalist movements. The theses did not put forward a concrete agrarian programme, since the subject was the East as a whole. The Congress, however, noted that revolutionary parties of all Eastern countries were bound clearly to define their own agrarian programme which had to demand a full elimination of feudalism and its remnants.

The Congress did not give an exaggeratedly optimistic assessment of the state of the labour movement in the East. The working class of Eastern countries, Congress documents underlined, was being drawn by the bourgeois nationalist intelligentsia into the struggle against imperialism, and at first it would not go beyond the bounds of the "common national" interests of bourgeois democracy in its actions. However, enormous prospects were opening up before the labour movement of the East. From the victorious proletariat, the theses went on to say, the oppressed peoples would receive selfless assistance; that was apparent from the experience of Soviet construction in the liberated colonies of the former Russian Empire. The proletariat of the Eastern countries, the Comintern believed, was faced with a whole epoch of struggle against imperialist exploitation and "its own" ruling classes; it should prepare itself for the role of political leader, gaining influence among peasant masses. The Congress branded refusal by Communists to take part in the fight against imperialist tyranny the worst form of opportunism. "Not less harmful," the theses stressed, "must be recognised the attempt to isolate oneself from the immediate and everyday interests of the working class for the sake of 'national unity' or 'civil peace' with bourgeois democracy."<sup>1</sup> In contending with imperialism, the working class would become the leader of the nation; in conducting a daily struggle for its direct interests it lent revolutionary scope to the fight against imperialism.

The Congress felt it expedient to advocate a united anti-imperialist front. The theses contained the idea that while the policy of a united workers front helped to expose the treacherous policy of right-wing social-democracy, the policy of a united anti-imperialist front helped expose the vacillation of individual groups of bourgeois nationalists; it emphasised that the labour movement of the colonies and semi-colonies

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>1</sup> *Resolutions and Theses of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, Held in Moscow, 1922.* Published by the Communist Party of Great Britain, London, 1922, p. 55.



had to gain the status of an independent revolutionary factor in that front.

"Only on the basis of recognition of this independence and the maintenance of complete independence is a temporary agreement with bourgeois democracy permissible and necessary."<sup>1</sup> Within the bounds of a united anti-imperialist front the proletariat also puts forward partial and transitional demands: maximum democratisation of the political regime, an independent democratic republic, abolition of all feudal rights and privileges, an end to the rightless position of women, agrarian reform, tax reforms, worker legislation, etc. Thus, the Fourth Comintern Congress indicated the exceptionally great importance of transitional demands on the scale of the proletariat's world struggle, working out their specific forms as applied to the conditions of Eastern countries.

The proletariat's slogans had to encourage a political alliance between the peasants and semi-proletarians on the one hand, and the labour movement, on the other. The theses said, "To explain to the masses of the toilers the necessity for an alliance with the international proletariat and the Soviet Republics is one of the most important tasks of the tactics of the Anti-Imperialist Front."<sup>2</sup>

The concluding section of the theses dealt with "The Tasks of the Communist Parties in the Home Countries".

The congress demanded that communist parties operating in imperialist countries step up their work in the colonies and render "systematic ideological and material assistance to the labour and revolutionary movement in the colonies".<sup>3</sup>

The Theses on the Eastern Question made more concrete the decisions of the Second Congress in circumstances when the Comintern was having to resolve the practical questions of interaction between the national-revolutionary and national-reformist organisations in the colonies. The document lucidly set out the task of dialectically linking the struggle for common national interests with that for the proletariat's specific class demands, and advanced the slogan of a united anti-imperialist front. The Congress, noting that non-participation in the national liberation struggle was opportunism of the worst kind and that, at the same time, any sermonising about "class peace" was absolutely out of the question, thereby specifically

<sup>1</sup> *Resolutions and Theses of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International Held in Moscow, 1922*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

expressed the fundamental Leninist idea of a temporary alliance of the working class with the bourgeois democrats of the colonies on the invariable condition of independence of the proletarian movement even in the most embryonic form.<sup>1</sup>

In the years that had passed since the Second Congress the Comintern had done a good deal of work in encouraging the developing communist movement in the East, and in establishing relations with mass national-revolutionary and national-reformist organisations. Life demanded more specific application of the general propositions. Of course, the Fourth Congress could not work out theoretically that "specific application" for many years ahead and with regard to every country in the East. That was something for the Comintern's practical work.

<sup>1</sup> Lenin did not directly participate in the work of the Eastern Commission of the Fourth Comintern Congress, but among other materials, he examined also the Draft General Theses on the Eastern Question.



## COMINTERN AND EASTERN SECTIONS

The communist parties of Indonesia, India, Indochina, the Philippines and China, which had originated as small groups, had at that time become the most influential communist parties of the East as far as the common people were concerned. In the period under review, the liberation movements, with the active participation of the proletariat, were particularly powerful in those countries. Because of various objective circumstances the Comintern Executive paid particularly great attention to the popular struggle and the communist movement of those countries. All that enables us to obtain the fullest picture of the Comintern's strategy and tactics on the national-colonial question, examining its policy primarily towards that groups of countries.

The Comintern was by no means an organisation that stood above communist parties; it was an international alliance of parties and a historically-conditioned form of existence of the great movement of Communists. Comintern policy was drawn up on the basis of the Leninist principle of collectivism.

## 1. COMINTERN AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDONESIA

A vivid example of the positive effect of Comintern activity on the communist and revolutionary movement in the Eastern countries was its policy in relation to the Communist Party of Indonesia and the liberation struggle of the people of that country.

In Indonesia, the biggest colony of imperialist Holland, petty-bourgeois democrats constituted the leading force of the national liberation movement after the October Revolution in

Russia. The prevailing capitalist system was almost exclusively represented by foreign capital. The Indonesian urban bourgeois, as a rule, owned a small workshop, stall or eating house; he regarded the colonial regime as exploitative and was anti-imperialist in sentiment. The petty-bourgeois Indonesian tried to latch on to those areas which were not monopolised by foreigners. The Indonesian working class, despite the weak development of local capital, was becoming a political force to be reckoned with. An industrial and plantation proletariat was taking shape mainly at Dutch businesses.

Those circumstances defined the specific nature of the national liberation movement in Indonesia—at first the petty-bourgeois intellectuals enjoyed a predominant influence, then there was an accelerated (compared with other countries) enhancement of the proletariat in the national struggle.

Within the first anti-imperialist organisation, set up in 1912 and advocating the country's independence, Sarekat Islam (Islamic Alliance), it was the petty-bourgeois democrats that set the tone; they regarded the religious community as an effective form of anti-imperialist unity. Active within Sarekat Islam were national-liberal elements inclined towards collaboration with the colonialists. In 1914, Dutch Social-Democrats residing in Indonesia set up their own organisation—the Social-Democratic Association. In 1917, right-wing opportunists left the Association, and it began propagandist and organisational work within the trade unions of Indonesian workers and the middle class, and within the peasant movement. With the upsurge in the national struggle and influenced by the Social-Democratic Association, Sarekat Islam announced "criminal capitalism" and foreign enslavers to be the principal foes of the Indonesian people. The SI became a mass organisation of peasants, workers and members of the urban middle class. And its anti-capitalist tendency intensified.

In a situation of an upsurge in the labour and anti-capitalist movement, the Social-Democratic Association Congress which met in Semarang on 23 May 1920 decided to rename the organisation the Communist Party of Indonesia. And in December that year the party conference in Semarang unanimously voted for the Party's affiliation to the Communist International. In early 1921, the Party numbered only 200-300 members. But it was extending its influence within the trade union movement as well as in SI. The relations of Communists, for example, with the biggest union in the country,



the Transport Workers' Federation, were long-lasting and firm; in fact, the union was headed by Semaun, a leader of the Communist Party. Communists attracted many local SI organisations. "Red" sections existed within SI ranks up to its congress on October 1921. But at the congress the conservative group at the head of SI, which had by that time consolidated its position, insisted on the adoption of a resolution banning simultaneous membership in other political organisations. The "red" sections that subsequently left SI formed an association known by the name of Red Sarekat Islam.

In the autumn of 1921, the prominent Indonesian Communist Darsono went to Moscow. He raised the question of including a representative of the Communist Party of Indonesia in the Executive Committee, and the Fourth Comintern Congress approved that proposal. Semaun's visit in late 1921 and early 1922 to Moscow and his meeting with Lenin was an important event for strengthening the Party's cooperation with the Comintern.

Lenin was acquainted with the state of affairs in the Indonesian revolutionary movement. There are also direct reminiscences that testify to Lenin's interest in Indonesia. During Semaun's visit to Moscow, Lenin spoke with him, as Semaun himself later related to the author of this book. Lenin, said Semaun, "then met not only me"; he met "many representatives from Eastern countries—Japanese, Koreans and others". That took place in early 1922. Evidently, Semaun had in mind Lenin's talk with members of delegations at the First Congress of the People of the Far East in January 1922. Semaun went on to say: "I remember Lenin asking 'Who is that comrade?' I replied: 'I am from the Dutch Indies. It is a small country.' Lenin asked: 'What is the population of your country?' I answered: 'Fifty million people.' Lenin said: 'That isn't at all small. Your country has as many people as Japan. In the future it [Indonesia—A.R.] may play a big part in revolution'."<sup>1</sup>

How did the leaders of the young communist party assess prospects for the liberation movement in Indonesia? In 1920 the newspaper *Het Vrije Woord* carried the theses by Party members Adolf Baars and Pieter Bergsma on the relationship of the Communist Party of Indonesia with non-communist

groupings. They considered that only movements "of the most oppressed people" could be revolutionary; other sections would inevitably go over to imperialism; as long as the proletarian masses of Indonesia lacked class consciousness every liberation movement was doomed to failure; the current "native movement" was absolutely powerless, since it was bourgeois; joint actions with non-proletarian patriots were useless. Baars and Bergsma insistently advised Communists to renounce any cooperation with "bourgeois and semi-bourgeois elements".<sup>1</sup>

At that time communist parties and groups in the East often stood opposed to nationalists in every respect. Yet masses of people followed the national-patriotic forces, and in a tactical sense the negative attitude of Communists was, of course, wrong.

Sectarianism among the young Communists was natural or, at any rate, explainable. The young Communists of the East saw the national bourgeoisie as the class enemy of the working people, and began therefore to attack it uncompromisingly, although the possibilities for anti-imperialist concerted action did exist.

The views of Baars and Bergsma were by no means exceptional. Darsono, who had come to communism from a national-revolutionary grouping, considered at the time that Communists ought to make their direct objective the setting up of a "worker-peasant Soviet system". Semaun at the time adhered to roughly the same views. Rejection of stage-by-stage development of revolution was a typical feature of the young Communists of the East. Therefore, it was all the more important for the Comintern to establish contact with them. Only in that way could they gain a proper understanding of the general laws of revolutionary struggle.

During the upsurge of revolutionary struggle of the Indonesian people, and particularly in the early 1920s, the SI mass base was becoming increasingly radicalised; this was largely due to the influence of Communists. The moderate wing of the bourgeois-democratic leadership of SI was afraid of this radicalisation, "lagged behind" it and gradually lost the trust of the people. At the same time, the Communist Party programme was attracting wide sections of the working people by its consistency and radical nature. The final split in SI came in February 1923, and a large part of its rank-

<sup>1</sup> A record of the meeting between A. B. Reznikov and Semaun on 21 May 1965 is filed by the Moscow Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the CPSU Central Committee.

<sup>1</sup> *Het Vrije Woord*, 25 August 1920.



and-file members and supporters followed the Communist Party, which became the most influential force of national liberation. Circumstances encouraged the party leaders to take an increasingly active part in the national movement. But many of them continued to believe that only a proletarian revolution could ensure national liberation.

The SI was unable to lead the anti-imperialist movement effectively; as a result, vast opportunity opened up for Communist Party activity among the patriotically-minded sections of the population. People who had taken up an anti-imperialist stance, yet far from Marxism-Leninism, were being attracted into the Communist Party. The growth of popularity of the Party gave grounds for the leaders in 1921-22 to draw the unjustifiably optimistic conclusion that the working people taking part in the national movement were changing to communist positions en masse. The Party meanwhile had turned into a conglomeration of people differing in social, political and ideological respects.

A situation was forming in Indonesia that was unique for the East at that time: a communist movement (headed by local leaders who had separated themselves from the left wing of the national liberation forces and who had serious support in the trade unions) was essentially the main militant anti-imperialist force in the country. That had taken place in a situation of an upsurge in the labour and peasant movement which, given all the unevenness of its development, remained at a high level right up to the end of 1926.

The national revolutionary-democratic front united by the Communist Party of Indonesia was, however, not as wide as the previous SI. Nonetheless, the Party contained an inherent contradiction: in so far as wide sections of the people had justly convinced themselves that it was a decisive fighter for national liberation, the Party was becoming more and more mass; but the growth in its influence engendered illusions among its leaders that the masses were already close to following the Party in the campaign for communist ideals.

How did the Comintern assess the situation and what was its policy in regard to the communist and the national liberation movement in the country?

Already in 1922 the Comintern had established regular contact with the Communist Party of Indonesia. In July 1922 the Eastern Section<sup>1</sup> of the Comintern Executive had dispatched

<sup>1</sup> It was reorganised in 1927 into the Eastern Secretariat.

Darsono to Java with instruction to put right allied relations between the Party and the national-revolutionary movement and to help form trade union organisations in the country. In January 1923, soon after the Fourth Congress, the Executive Committee sent a letter to the party leadership primarily underlining the need to strengthen the Party both ideologically and politically, and organisationally. This approach was typical of the Executive Committee in regard to all sections of the Comintern: the Party could not draw up its strategy and tactics and operate effectively until it was consolidated on a Marxist-Leninist basis. The Comintern noted the exceptional importance for Indonesia of the agrarian question and drew the attention of the party leadership to the need to work out a special agrarian programme. The Executive Committee advised the party leadership to strengthen and safeguard the Party's class independence; to step up the work of Communists within the broad revolutionary-nationalist associations or even reformist-nationalist organisations for the purpose of strengthening the revolutionary wing of the latter; to campaign doggedly for leading positions in the national movement which was seen as the prologue to anti-imperialist, democratic revolution; to train Marxist-Leninist leaders; and to instil internationalism in the ranks of the Communist Party.<sup>1</sup>

The letter had attached to it a message which the Executive Committee of the Comintern asked to be passed on to Dr. Omar Said Tjokroaminoto—leader of the Sarekat Islam, who still enjoyed considerable popular influence. Addressing itself to the Communist Party leadership, the Comintern Executive wrote, "You well know how important the Sarekat Islam movement is for us... The Third International takes great interest in this movement... The difficulties that two or three leaders of Sarekat Islam would create would be nothing compared to what we would gain by having the masses of Sarekat Islam with us." The Executive Committee said that the Comintern considered it desirable to establish legal or illegal relations with the SI, insistently advised the Communist Party leadership to campaign for the masses that were still supporting the SI, and recommended them to start negotiations with Tjokroaminoto.

The Executive Committee message to Tjokroaminoto said that the Comintern was a revolutionary organisation of workers

<sup>1</sup> See: *The Comintern and the East. The Struggle for the Leninist Strategy and Tactics in National Liberation Movement*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1979.



of the whole world. Nationalist and religious aspirations were strong in the Indonesian labour movement. Nationalist agitation in Indonesia linked to Islam was not simply a movement of the bourgeoisie for driving out foreign capitalists and establishing bourgeois power. It had a certain mass character. That found expression also in the radicalisation of the SI, particularly in its demands for far-reaching agrarian changes. The movement for national liberation and for socio-economic change met sympathy and support from the Comintern. The Executive Committee reminded him that the Second Comintern Congress had adopted a decision to help the colonies and semi-colonies in their struggle for liberation. The Committee did not conceal the fact that Communists and national-patriotic forces have different ultimate goals. But that, the message said, could not serve as an obstacle in the way of joint struggle against capitalism and imperialism. The unity of capitalists all over the world should be counterposed by the unity of supporters of national liberation and Communists. The Committee proposed to Tjokroaminoto that together they should draw up a common programme of action. How he reacted to the message is not known. Apparently the Comintern never received a reply.

Having acquainted themselves with the January letter of the Executive Committee the leaders of the Communist Party of Indonesia did not deem it necessary to follow Comintern advice. In his letter of reply on behalf of the Party, one of the party leaders, Aliarcham, wrote that after SI leaders had not agreed with the principle of double membership of Communists in both parties, the Communist Party had broken with the SI (that decision had been taken by the party congress in Bandung in March 1923); SI influence was falling; the sections that had splintered off from it were still calling themselves the Red Sarekat Islam, but the name was to be removed and replaced by "the name of our Party". That was the gist of the letter. Aliarcham mentioned with satisfaction that Tjokroaminoto was increasingly veering to the right and coming close to right-wing positions. And Indonesia did not have, in Aliarcham's opinion, any mass national party with which the Communists could set up contact.

Aliarcham's letter expressed the views of the party leadership. Being confronted by the unprecedented phenomenon—the strong pull of peasants and workers of Indonesia towards communism, as they understood it—the young party leaders saw that as the transition of working people to communist

positions, and did not yet notice that the common people were supporting the Party first and foremost as a national liberation force. Later, when it would become obvious that the working people were being drawn into the Communist Party primarily because they considered it a revolutionary anti-imperialist organisation, the party leaders, by that time already having adopted a policy of direct implementation of a proletarian revolution, went off to the other extreme. Since they did not count on gaining support from the petty-bourgeois masses and the peasantry for their policy of socialist revolution, they decided to curtail work among them. But in 1923 the leadership still believed that the petty-bourgeois-peasant Red Sarekat Islam could become part of the Party.

Logically it followed from Aliarcham's letter that objectively the nationalist party was losing influence among the common people; they were switching over to the Communist Party and becoming Communists; there was no more place for a non-communist liberation movement in Indonesia; the worse (more right-wing) the policy of nationalist leaders, the sooner the masses would join the Communist Party; there could be no talk whatever of any type of alliance with those leaders. The writer of the letter could not imagine the power of a national movement in an oppressed country, believing that it was dissolving in a communist movement. As a result, the historical proportions and prospects became confused. The real possibility that had opened up before the Party—to win leadership of the national liberation stage of the revolution and resolve problems which other parties and groups were incapable of coping at the moment—was perceived as an imaginary possibility of bypassing that stage.

In 1923 the influence of the Communist Party as an anti-imperialist organisation continued to grow. After the SI split at the 1923 congress many of its sections expressed their readiness to act under Communist Party leadership. As many as 15 large communist organisations (mainly from the industrial cities of Java), 13 trade unions, and 13 Red Sarekat Islam sections were represented at the party congress in 1923 held in Bandung. In 1923 the Communists published more newspapers (both in number of titles and in printing) than all the national-patriotic groupings taken together. The Communist Party had become the leader of a broad popular movement. And although the defeat of the Party-led railway workers strike in 1923 was a grave setback for it, it brought only a temporary weakening of the Party.



Indonesian Communists residing in the metropolitan country set up in 1923 a group in Amsterdam which later became the Foreign Bureau of the Communist Party of Indonesia. Semaun headed the Bureau, which ensured contacts between the Party and the Comintern Executive Committee. What is more, it launched vigorous activity in the Indonesian Seamen's Union, set up by the Foreign Bureau; the members of the Union illegally brought communist literature into Indonesia. The Union published a monthly magazine called *Pandu Merah* (*De Roode Gids*—Red Pilot). Reflecting the viewpoint of the Foreign Bureau, the magazine wrote on 15 July 1924: "The oppressed peoples must maintain contact with the Communist International because they and the Comintern have one and the same enemy—international capitalism and international imperialism."

The Party was on the upsurge in 1924. The congress held in June represented, according to the party leadership, 2,320 party members and some 100,000 members of the Sarekat Rakjat (SR)—Union of the People, as the Red Sarekat Islam had now called itself. The change of names testified to the Communist Party's intention utterly to squeeze out the SI as an influential participant in the national liberation struggle. The congress adopted a decision on transferring party headquarters from Semarang to the chief city of the colony—Batavia. Together with its mass organisations the Communist Party was increasingly becoming the centre of attraction for national liberation forces. In December 1924, a conference of the Communist Party of Indonesia and Sarekat Rakjat took place in Jogjakarta. It accepted the proposal of the Party Central Committee gradually to dissolve the SR, that mass (primarily peasant) organisation. By that time the party leadership had begun seriously to think of organising in the near future an insurrection with the aim of seizing power. In that connection it had decided to bring the social base of the movement "into line with the objective", i.e., to try to rely exclusively on the proletariat. According to that logic, there was no need for work in the peasant SR.

In April 1925, the Fifth Plenum of the Enlarged Executive Committee of the Communist International adopted a resolution "On Work in Java" (when the resolution was being drafted the ECCI had not yet known of the decisions of the December conference of the Communist Party of Indonesia). The Plenum noted: "The revolutionary national-democratic party Sarekat Rakjat has merged with the Communist Party of Indonesia. That has

slowed down the development of the Communist Party into a class-proletarian party. Some leading Javan comrades, being insufficiently in touch with the Comintern, have until recently been advancing slogans of Soviet government for their country." As a result, wide sections of the peasants and urban bourgeoisie did not unite around the SR. The Plenum considered it necessary to strengthen the class proletarian base<sup>1</sup> of the Communist Party. The lack of any sort of large national bourgeoisie in Java, the resolution said, defined the nature of the national-revolutionary parties, but certainly did not mean that all the local population was not aspiring for national independence. On the contrary, that peculiar feature provided the objective possibility for the liberation movement in Java to become more revolutionary and more consistent than in other colonies. The Plenum recommended the Communist Party of Indonesia to adopt a revolutionary platform envisaging the country's independence, calling a national assembly, universal suffrage, a radical land reform and an eight-hour working day. The Comintern Executive advised the separation of the SR and the Communist Party of Indonesia organisationally—"while retaining our leadership and while our members take part in Sarekat Rakjat organisations".<sup>1</sup>

The Eastern Section of the ECCI sent the resolution to Tan Malaka (that Indonesian Communist was at that time a "Comintern plenipotentiary in countries of East Asia"), with detailed explanations accompanying the document. They said in particular that the Executive Committee was setting the Communist Party of Indonesia three interconnected tasks: to extend the proletarian basis and strengthen communist ideology of the Party; to seek suitable forms for leading the SR, not forgetting thereby the petty-bourgeois nature of the organisation and the need for the SR to have a programme of national liberation, and not a "quasi-communist" programme; to find a way of approach to the national movement as a whole, and especially to the SI. So the Executive Committee, in putting forward the objective of strengthening the leading role of the Communist Party of Indonesia in the national liberation movement, by no means understood that as the "conversion" of national-revolutionary organisations into communist organisations.

The Eastern Section of the Comintern Executive Committee then informed the Central Committee of the CPI of the decision

<sup>1</sup> *Kommunist*, No. 4, 1969, pp. 15-17.



to organise a bureau for translating Lenin's works into Indonesian.

Once it had received information on the decisions of the CPI's December conference, the Comintern redoubled its efforts to convince party leaders of the need to change their strategy. In its May 1925 letter to the Party Central Committee the Eastern Section said that at a time when the Executive Committee was preparing a resolution on the CPI's work, it had not known the decisions of the Party's December conference. These had now been received. In the opinion of the Eastern Section, the conference decision to disband the SR gradually meant renouncing leadership of the vast bulk of the Indonesian population in the struggle against Dutch imperialism. The proletariat cannot count on success, the letter went on to say, unless it obtained the active support of the peasantry. Communists should link up the struggle of the peasants against the exploiters with the general national struggle to liberate Indonesia. The Eastern Section recommended party leaders to abandon their intention of disbanding Sarekat Rakjat.

Those recommendations, which had developed the propositions of the Fifth Plenum, were useful and necessary, inasmuch as the CPI leadership then decided to curtail work among the peasantry. Later on another extreme tendency has arisen in the communist movement of some Eastern countries—notably, to see peasants as the paramount force in the revolution, and that has been a grave mistake. But no less erroneous was it to regard revolutionary work among the peasants as a factor of secondary importance. When we refer to the vanguard role of the working class in the East, we mainly have in mind political leadership of the peasant masses by the working class and its party. In itself the concentration of considerable party effort on work among the peasants is not a mistake; on the contrary, it is a necessary condition for the working class to carry out its mission of leading the peasant masses. What is a mistake is to neglect the proletariat's own demands, to reject the class struggle of workers, to reject proletarian ideology and to replace it by the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry, by populism. When the CPI leaders began to orient the Party on rejecting the establishment of allied relations between the proletariat and the peasantry, so that the proletariat should shed that "load" in striving towards socialist revolution, the Comintern straightaway drew attention to the seriousness of the error and proposed that the CPI correct it.

In August 1925, the CPI Central Committee informed the

Comintern Executive through Semaun of its agreement with the recommendations set out in the Eastern Section's letters. Nevertheless, the CPI leaders were not intending to carry out the resolutions of the Fifth Plenum and the recommendations of the Eastern Section, Aliarcham and his supporters objected to turning the SR into a mass national-revolutionary organisation; in their opinion, the Indonesian peasantry was not yet ready to have their own political organisation, and the SR should be a "purely economic" organisation. The CPI leaders wanted to have the nationalist leaders under their guidance. Such was the CPI Central Committee's line at that time, although the party leaders assured the Comintern that they were in accord with its recommendations.<sup>1</sup>

The ECCI realised that Indonesian party leaders were ignoring their advice. The Executive and the Eastern Section continued to insist on a revision of the line to disband the SR. The materials on that issue very clearly detail the way in which it swung from one extreme to the other: first it had built the party on a "non-party basis"—the Communist Party and Sarekat Rakjat were practically single organisation; and then, after the Executive had drawn the leadership's attention to the impermissibility of such a position and had proposed that it differentiate between the two organisations, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Indonesia had pursued a policy of destroying the SR.

Meanwhile an event took place in the metropolitan country which was destined to become an important landmark in the history of the liberation movement of the Indonesian people. At a time when bourgeois nationalism in Indonesia had suffered one setback after another and when the leading role in the struggle against Dutch imperialism had increasingly shifted to the Communist Party of Indonesia, the activity of the national-revolutionary organisation of Indonesian students, the Perhimpunan Indonesia (PI) had sharply grown within Holland. Under the influence of news from Indonesia, the PI became radicalised. In November 1925, it sent a "resolution of support" to the Comintern Executive, which said that the PI supported the Comintern tactics in relation to the national liberation movement.<sup>2</sup> The organisation paved the way for the emergence of national-revolutionary and national-reformist associations which

<sup>1</sup> See: *The Comintern and the East. The Struggle...*

<sup>2</sup> See: Ruth T. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1965, p. 241.



were to have a great deal of decisive influence on the subsequent development of Indonesia.

At the end of 1925 a group of Indonesian party leaders at a meeting in Solo in Central Java adopted a decision to head directly for an armed uprising. Relying on the party authority as a vanguard fighter for independence and advancing the immediate demands of the working people, the leaders intended to use the growing socio-political tension in the country and bring the Party to power.

In April 1926, Tan Malaka, being in Manila, informed the Comintern Executive of the uprising being prepared in Indonesia. In December 1925, he wrote, "certain comrades" in Indonesia had adopted a resolution in which they announced their intention of commencing an uprising in Java and other islands. Their decision was based on the "presence of strong reaction" and not the readiness of the Party for an uprising. He (Tan Malaka) had tried without success to restrain the leaders of the Communist Party of Indonesia from its putsch intentions. But they had displayed stubbornness, since their views were a mixture of "sectarianism, anarchism and mysticism". On the subject of the party leadership's intention to disband the SR gradually, Tan Malaka wrote that the leaders were effectively sending the peasants to "hell". He noted the false logic of the party leadership: in so far as reaction in Indonesia was strong, Communists should allow themselves to be provoked to premature insurrection, the main thing being to get arms; the party leadership had already set the insurrection date. Tan Malaka assessed the leadership's intentions as reckless and felt that an insurrection would be suicide for Communists; he drew the Comintern Executive Committee's attention to the fact that millions of Indonesian peasants were not yet mature enough for political struggle, and he underlined the need for the Party to uphold the concrete and urgent demands of the working people. In his opinion, the Party should not allow itself to be provoked in any way: the success of the insurrection depended not only on the number of guns that the insurrectionists could count on—that was something the party leaders in Java did not understand; the leaders were not yet revolutionaries in the Bolshevik understanding of the word. Tan Malaka's information was very important. As subsequent events showed, the Comintern Executive took an extremely serious view of this information.

Top Indonesian communist leaders Musso and Alimin arrived in Moscow in July 1926 with Central Committee mandates to have talks with the Comintern Executive Committee. They were joined

by Semaun and Darsono who were in Moscow. The Indonesian Party delegation presented the Executive Committee with material on the situation in their country and Party; it said that the meeting held in late 1925 in Solo had noted the following: the SR was banned and it was impossible to turn it into an independent national-revolutionary party; the SI was completely ruined; the Party and trade unions were practically outlawed; indignation was growing among the people. In that connection the meeting had adopted a decision "to reply to reaction with powerful resistance and an uprising". According to Musso and Alimin, just before they had left for Moscow the Communist Party of Indonesia had 8,000 members, while the SR had over 100,000. The Executive Committee put a number of questions to the delegation. In reply, the delegation declared that the SI was in a state of complete collapse; the SR, despite the decision on its disbandment, was constantly growing and had become "identical to the Communist Party"; the Party controlled the unions with a total membership of in excess of 20,000 people. In the words of its delegates, the Party, the SR and the "Red unions" had been ready for a general insurrection in June 1926, but had put it off while waiting for the advice and backing of the Comintern.

Indonesian Party representatives, nevertheless, had been unable to give a clear picture of the situation in the country and the Party. They spoke of the readiness for insurrection and, at the same time, had talked of merciless repressions by the government. The latter fact, incidentally, was also cited to justify an insurrection. Alimin did not conceal that, as party leaders expected, a victorious uprising would ensure power to a Joint Action Committee. That committee would be formed out of the uprising organisers. Alimin made no bones about the fact that the party leadership was intending to seize power for itself. The party delegation, adhered to a certain tactic in endeavouring to create the impression that, first, the whole Party (and not a narrow group of leaders) was eager for the action; second, that the scattered outbreaks of popular anger were already actually growing into a universal uprising; third, that the communist forces were on the rise with every passing day.

On 9 August 1926 a group of ECCI leading members received the delegation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Indonesia. The Executive members put questions to the delegation on the situation in Indonesia. The delegates reported that the Communist Party represented the only real political



force in the country and that "the idea of proletarian dictatorship was being raised in the Communist Party". What was being referred to was a dictatorship of the proletariat not as a long-term goal but as a direct objective that came from the Party's leading status in the liberation movement; and that stemmed not so much from the fact that the Communist Party was acting as the most consistent anti-imperialist force as from the fact that it was the party of social revolution.

The delegation wanted to obtain Comintern sanction for a "mass uprising" which it intended to hold under Communist Party leadership. On this occasion the delegation did not specify in whose hands power would be held after the uprising's victory. While earlier they had not concealed that the Party would set itself the goal of taking power, now the delegation was more circumspect. It said that the Communist Party of Indonesia was putting forward slogans of a popular legislative assembly elected by universal suffrage, democratic liberties, removal of land taxes, the freeing of political prisoners and higher wages. Further the delegation explained that they "keep in mind the questions of secession [from Holland-A.R.] and proletarian dictatorship, but do not yet put them in practice".

In their recommendations the Executive drew the attention of the Indonesian Party delegation primarily to the need to take account of the specific internal situation. Industry in Indonesia was at a low level and there were still few industrial workers. It therefore followed that the Communist Party "could not at the moment decide things" without attracting left-wing nationalists. To give the movement a general national character it would be sensible to set up a revolutionary bloc with the participation of Communists, national-revolutionary and democratic organisations. At the same time, although the Party might feel itself a national leader, it had not yet become one in fact. For that it needed to operate in more or less "open conditions". The Party, after all, was working mainly underground and "could not be so strong as the comrades had said, and was still little known to the common people".

Democratic freedoms in Indonesia could be won, said the Executive members, only through "a democratic national revolution". It would be the first stage of revolution in Indonesia. The Executive Committee well appreciated that Indonesian Communists were preparing to start an uprising precisely with the aim of seizing power. Therefore, it informed the CPI delegation: "The question of proletarian dictatorship—that is, of seizing power by the Communist Party, and the confiscation of

factories, mills, banks, railways belonging to the Dutch should not be put for the moment, since that would not be understood by the common people and would encounter a united front of imperialists, with the odds obviously in their favour."

The Executive recommended the following slogans for the given stage of revolution: the convening of a national parliament on the basis of universal suffrage which would mean "altering the agreement with Holland",<sup>1</sup> proclaiming freedom of speech, the press and assembly; implementing the specific demands of the peasants and workers. Realisation of these slogans would create a completely new situation in the East and would stimulate an intensification of the revolutionary movement in China and India. The Executive members again underlined the futility of the Indonesian Party coming out at that moment with the aim of seizing state power. It was important not merely to seize power, they said, but also to hold on to it; Indonesian Communists ought to begin with revolutionary-democratic demands and should encourage the people to come gradually to the idea of dictatorship of the proletariat in the course of the struggle. So, the Comintern Executive regarded it inexpedient to put the seizure of power as a direct aim of insurrection.

In assessing the steps taken by the Executive Committee in August 1926 one has to admit that they were timely: if the party leadership had followed that advice it would have saved the Party from disaster.

In the summer of 1926, the Executive Committee began intensive work on preparing a resolution on the Indonesian question. This was one of those cases when a Comintern decision, if reacted to timely and correctly, could effectively influence the fate of the revolutionary movement in a big country. The Communist Party was the most mass and organised anti-imperialist force in the colony; the fate of the revolutionary movement in Indonesia essentially depended on its political line. It was a section of the Comintern and as such it was obliged to carry out its decisions.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian Party delegation had insisted on approving the party leadership's line. In some degree that could be put down to the state of affairs within the Party itself. It suffered a great deal of persecution. Many prominent figures in the Party, including Aliarcham, were in exile. The authorities were intending to exile a new group of Communists. Central Committee member Sugono, who had been arrested

<sup>1</sup> The direct objective of state secession was therefore not yet put.



in April, had died in prison. Repressions had become extensive. The young party existed in an atmosphere of despair, and despair is a poor counsellor. In the summer of 1926 the Party Central Committee circulated a leaflet in the country calling for a general strike "combined with revolution". It said that revolution might break out "tomorrow or the day after". The political programme contained in that leaflet included demands for democratic liberties, the country's complete independence, the establishment of a Soviet government and organisation of a Red Army.

The draft resolution drawn up in the Comintern Executive and submitted to the Presidium in August 1926 mentioned that the revolutionary movement in Indonesia was aimed primarily at imperialist tyranny and embraced all sections of the native population. The Communist Party's tactics should be based on a revolutionary alliance with left-wing nationalists; in its activity the Party ought to rely on wide sections of the working class, farm labourers and the peasants and should involve in the liberation movement artisans, intellectuals and democratic sections of the local bourgeoisie. It drew special attention to the need to create in Indonesia a mass revolutionary party on the basis of the SI and SR organisations. The draft stressed that in this the Party should retain its own organisational and political independence; the Party must gain actual leadership of the "national-revolutionary struggle bloc" and utterly exclude "command methods". The Party was not recommended to aim for getting Communists into all the leading posts in the national-revolutionary groupings. It could win a leading position in the bloc through its sincere and vigorous fight for national independence (the Comintern Executive was then following an analogous line in regard to the objectives of communist parties of other oppressed countries). The slogan of establishing Soviet power in Indonesia was recognised as "untimely and even dangerous for the interests of a united national front and the possibility of manoeuvring to make use of contradictions of the imperialist powers". Similarly, the slogan of a bourgeois-democratic republic was also thought to be inapplicable. Essentially, the task was set for setting up a national-democratic state ("a people's republic") which was to ensure the participation of wide sections of the people in governing it. The draft formulated the principal objectives of the democratic stage of the revolution, among which winning national independence was the most urgent.

On 17 September 1926, the draft was adopted by the ECCI

Presidium as a basis, after which it was subject to certain amendments. Specific points were worked out more carefully. The final text clearly formulated the tasks of the Communist Party of Indonesia in the national revolution: to overthrow the tyranny of imperialists and feudals, to set up a government of exploited people in the shape of a "people's republic", to form a national-revolutionary bloc and ensure the proletariat's political leadership of it. That Presidium sitting was attended by Palmiro Togliatti, D. Z. Manuilski, Otto Kuusinen, Sen Katayama, Vittorio Codovilla as well as by all members of the Indonesian Party delegation.

Musso and Alimin departed for home. On leaving Moscow they did not inform the Comintern that they had no intention of heeding its advice. However, their position was precisely that. Soon after the talk in the Executive Committee, the two men, without coordinating their action with the Comintern, sent their Party Central Committee permission to proceed with the uprising that was being prepared. And in November, while they were still en route, an uprising broke out in Java which was put down in a few days by the Dutch (another insurrection, in early 1927 in Sumatra, was similarly defeated). The Communist Party was smashed and the revolutionary movement in the country pushed back unable to resume its vigour for many years.

According to Musso's information during his talks with the Executive, only five Central Committee members had taken part in the meeting in Solo that had adopted the decision on insurrection. He was naturally not interested in playing down the representative nature of the meeting. There are therefore grounds to believe that his testimony was reliable. So, the decision committing the Party to an uprising was taken not by a party conference and not by the Party Central Committee, but by a narrow group of people whom Musso and Alimin had actually represented in Moscow in 1926.<sup>1</sup> This was an effect of the tactics that many leading figures of the Communist Party of Indonesia had been used to while working in the terrorist conspiratorial organisation—section B of the Sarekat Islam.

After the defeat of the 1926-27 uprisings the Comintern Executive, which had taken all measures to prevent the unprepared and premature actions in Indonesia, took up the only proper

<sup>1</sup> After about forty years a lot of what had happened in late 1926 sadly was repeated. The decision associating the Communist Party with the so-called 30 September Movement (1965) was also taken not by the Central Committee or the Party Politburo but by a narrow and non-empowered group of people.



position of organising a protest campaign against the persecution that the Dutch had launched in the colony. It continued to work on tactics which it recommended to Communists of Indonesia; it based itself on the notion that the rout of the Communist Party in late 1926 and early 1927 had brought only a break in the development of the communist movement in the country.

The Executive chastised the "European philistines" who were censuring the rebellious workers and peasants of Indonesia. That was typical of the Comintern position. In full accord with Lenin's ideas, the Comintern Executive never in any circumstances put the blame for defeat on the direct participants in the action, on the common people.

Tan Malaka and his followers were in despair after all these events. They changed their position and views fundamentally. Before the uprising's defeat Malaka had endeavoured to follow the Comintern line; after the defeat he organised a new party that estranged itself from the Comintern. Previous to the defeat he had thought that the unjustified course of having an insurrection would lead the Party to a catastrophe; but afterwards he declared that a social revolution in Indonesia was on the agenda. He departed from the communist movement and more and more came to take up a nationalist position. Subsequently, he led a radical-nationalist trend that opposed the Communist Party.

Alimin and Musso came to Moscow. Alimin began studies and Musso took up work in the Profintern (Red International of Labour Unions). Darsono continued to work for several years in the Comintern. In 1929, while in Berlin on business for the Anti-Imperialist League (an international organisation set up in 1927), Darsono suggested that the Comintern Executive invite to Europe the chairman of the Nationalist Party of Indonesia, an engineer by the name of Sukarno, to take part in the Anti-Imperialist League congress. The suggestion had no consequences. At that time it was difficult to imagine that the then little-known engineer Sukarno would in time become the leader of the national liberation movement and first President of independent Indonesia. At the end of 1929 Darsono broke with the Comintern, being dissatisfied with its attitude to left-wing nationalists.

While Musso and Alimin were in Moscow, leader of the Communist Party's Foreign Bureau Semaun had actually supported their attempts to obtain the Comintern sanction for the uprising in Indonesia, but after its defeat he went to the opposite

extreme. In December 1926, without consulting the Comintern Executive, he started negotiations in Holland with Mohammad Hatta, leader of the Perhimpunan Indonesia. A written agreement resulted from the talks. As was clear from the document, Semaun made unacceptable political concessions to the nationalists. He recognised that from then on Perhimpunan Indonesia would have "supreme leadership of and full responsibility for the popular movement in Indonesia", while the Communist Party would agree to act under its guidance. By signing that agreement Semaun violated one of the most important principles which the Comintern had unswervingly insisted upon—that of unqualified retention of ideological-political and organisational independence of Communists (in addition Semaun was not empowered to sign such an important document). Later Semaun tried to justify his action by the fact that the Party had been smashed and therefore he was not sacrificing anything in signing the agreement with Hatta. The Comintern Executive condemned his action as capitulationist. That is exactly what it was: by signing the agreement with Hatta Semaun was essentially admitting that all future party activity would occur under the leadership of the nationalists. The Semaun-Hatta agreement was recognised as inoperative.

In 1927, the Comintern Executive once again returned to the question of the communist and national liberation movement in Indonesia. It discussed the draft programme of action of the Communist Party of Indonesia, summing up the lessons of its defeat. The Executive described the uprising in Indonesia as the first mass revolutionary action in colonial countries taking place under the direct leadership of a communist party.

The Comintern drew the attention of Communists to their direct objectives. The prime and most urgent of them was "to rebuild the Party as a completely independent organisation, be it at the cost of 'the greatest sacrifices'".<sup>1</sup> It recommended Communists to join national organisations, set up left groupings within them and orient the organisations on a planned revolutionary struggle against colonial oppression. The Communist Party was set the task of once again becoming the leading force in the national liberation movement. For that it had to initiate a non-communist mass revolutionary organisation in the country and develop organisational work within it. This Comintern proposition fully corresponded to the principles which it had adhered to since the Second Congress. Communist

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 7, No. 69, 1927, p. 1562.



parties in countries of the East, as elsewhere, had to work "wherever the masses are to be found".<sup>1</sup> They had to operate in non-communist, national-revolutionary organisations, forming a left wing within them, orienting them on decisive actions, but not striving to "seize leadership" straightaway. In order to lead the national-revolutionary movement Communists had to win the people's trust, prove in deed that they were the most advanced and sincere fighters for the aims proclaimed by revolutionary patriots.

The Comintern then understood leadership by communist parties of popular movements in Eastern countries as follows: the communist parties in several Eastern countries could as a matter of principle become leaders of national liberation movements (the possibility of parties taking influential positions within the movement had already been confirmed, in particular, by the Indonesian experience), but that did not mean immediately taking over leadership. Further, the Comintern in no way oriented parties on an immediate proletarian revolution at that stage of the revolutionary process. That would be artificially and prematurely "combining" the two stages of revolution—the anti-imperialist (democratic) and the socialist. Only petty-bourgeois ultra-left revolutionaries could talk of such a "combination".

Resolutely opposing tactics of unjustified "leaps" in the revolutionary process, the Comintern Executive at the same time constantly underlined that there was no hard and fast line between the anti-imperialist revolution and the beginning of transformations leading to socialism. Ever since the start of revolution in China between 1925 and 1927, the Comintern had more and more often advanced the slogan of non-capitalist development for Eastern countries—a thing quite possible, as was then assumed, even before the establishment of power by the working class and its party. The state that was destined to arise through the victory of anti-imperialist revolution was not seen as a bourgeois state. It was conceived as a "national republic", a "people's republic", a "state of the people" where power would belong to a revolutionary bloc of the working class, peasantry, revolutionary intelligentsia, urban and petty bourgeoisie. It was not precluded that, depending on the circumstances, the most radical part of the national bourgeoisie could become a temporary participant in that bloc.

At the end of the 1920s, the Comintern Executive grew firmer in their belief that Communists could assume leadership

of the national movement in a historically short span. In regard to a number of countries that conclusion was subsequently not borne out. Its emergence, however, was perfectly understandable. After all, Indonesia had already been the example of rapid arrival of a communist party to leadership of the anti-imperialist movement. That had occurred, in particular, because the national bourgeoisie in Indonesia was weak, did not have firm socio-economic support and, besides, was politically inconsistent. China was another example where national bourgeois groups enjoyed much stronger positions and where they, together with political representatives of bourgeois-landowner sections, had entered into an open deal with imperialism, thereby deserting the revolutionary camp. They, however, had not left the field of action free for the communist party (as had happened in the early 1920s in Indonesia, when Sarekat Islam's influence had waned), but had inflicted a severe blow on the Communist Party of China. All that did much to explain the fact that the Comintern Executive, acting in a situation of mounting economic and socio-political crisis and in line with the will of Eastern communist parties themselves, pointed to the need for them swiftly to take leading positions in the national liberation movement.

In itself the orientation of communist parties on leadership of the national liberation movement in no way was negative; but it was important fully to assess the difficulties of achieving that objective. At the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, it was assumed, however, that it would not take Communists much time to set up a united front and win leadership in it. What is more, it was thought that a united front should not include national-reformist, and later also national-revolutionary elements. But if within that planned united front national-reformists and national-revolutionaries could not take genuine effective part, then the front would be an alliance of the working class and the peasantry. If that turned out to be the case, bearing in mind that the class interests of the working people were being expressed by the communist party, the idea of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the working class and the peasantry, i.e., not yet a dictatorship of the proletariat, actually meant, nonetheless, a policy of communist parties coming to power (moreover, of course, the taking of power was not announced as a *direct objective*). Such coming to power should not signify, however, a socialist revolution, but it naturally was bound to bring it closer. What resulted was that although the task of the proletariat

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism—an Infantile Disorder", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 53.



and its party gaining leading positions within the national movement still stood, it meant essentially, if implemented, an accelerated conversion of the national movement into a proletarian revolution. The possible rate of development of the revolutionary process in the East was overestimated in Comintern calculations in the late 1920s and the first half of the 1930s.

Of course, at the present time, when the outcome of past revolutionary battles is long known, when their history has already been written, one can seek and find reasons for "criticism" with the benefit of hindsight and see what would have been more or less expedient in Comintern work. But that approach would be unhistorical and unjust. Comintern leaders were treading new ground. At that time much was happening for the very first time: the first great anti-imperialist revolution in the East in which a communist party was taking a most active part (China, 1925-1927); the first advance of a communist party in a colony to leading positions in the national liberation movement (Indonesia slightly earlier); the first and initially successful experience of communist party work within national-revolutionary and national-reformist organisations (in the revolutionary Kuomintang in China and in the Indian National Congress); the first ever disappointments on the path of cooperation with non-proletarian anti-imperialist forces in the colonies and semi-colonies; the first attempt to continue to elaborate Lenin's ideas of non-capitalist development in the oppressed countries; the first theoretical and practical efforts, after Lenin's death, by the international communist movement to define the possibilities and the limits of using the experience of the October Revolution in the East. All that was being done for the very first time.

The Comintern, having set in 1927 the Communists of Indonesia the task once again of occupying vanguard positions within the national liberation movement, at the same time stressed the expediency and need for them to establish contact with the liberation movement in India, Indochina and the Philippines. They were recommended to put forward the following immediate slogans which were to help form in Indonesia a national-revolutionary bloc comprising the proletariat, peasantry, revolutionary intelligentsia, urban petty bourgeoisie and other anti-imperialist sections: amnesty for political prisoners, withdrawal of the occupation army, freedom of association, assembly and the press, legalisation of the communist party and other revolutionary organisations, the transfer of the land and all

its resources to the people, the annulment of privileges of foreign plantation owners, elimination of vestiges of serfdom, nationalisation of the railways, factories and mills belonging to the Dutch, the eight-hour day, democratisation of the tax system, "equal rights for all native languages", measures to do away with illiteracy. That was a programme of action whose essence boiled down to a demand for the independence of Indonesia and the establishment of a "national republic".

Finally, the Comintern Executive Committee recommended Indonesian Communists carefully to think over the problem of partisan struggle against the colonialists. In its opinion, it could become a substantial prerequisite for a popular uprising. The Comintern thought armed struggle permissible and, in certain circumstances, an unavoidable means. On the other hand, it categorically opposed any artificial organisation of a partisan war in a situation where political tension, revolutionary anger, frustration and hatred of the masses had not yet reached a degree at which the working people were ready to take up arms.

In 1927 an Executive representative went to Indonesia and visited Batavia and Semarang. His attempt to make contact with Indonesian Communists was unsuccessful. He did establish, however, that the central bodies of the Party had been dispersed and were, to all intents and purposes, not functioning.

In 1932, the Comintern Executive returned to an analysis of the events of 1926-1927 in Indonesia and made important recommendations to Communists. At that time it had come to the conclusion that the uprisings of 1926-1927 had been defeated not only because of the terror launched by the Dutch colonialists, but also because of the treachery of the national-reformist bourgeoisie. Neither Sarekat Islam, nor other nationalist organisations, the Comintern Executive stressed, had done anything to defend popular interests from the onslaught of imperialism. It put forward the slogan of overthrowing the rule of Dutch imperialism and full state independence. It recommended to advance demands for organising a worker-peasant government of Indonesia on the basis of councils (Soviets), as well as for confiscating all the lands of imperialists, landowners and usurers for the benefit of the peasants and workers.

Already during preparations for the Seventh Comintern Congress, the Executive was taking measures to reestablish the Communist Party of Indonesia with a new political course. The activity of Musso, who had illegally arrived in Indonesia in mid-1935, had a good deal of importance during that period. The Comintern instructed him to unite the Communists of



Indonesia who had survived into a single organisation. Musso wrote to the Executive from Indonesia that the term "popular front", though sounding somewhat novel, nonetheless reminded him of the previous experience. He launched a great deal of work in organising communist groups in those nationalist parties that were operating legally. Judging by Musso's information, several figures in the national-revolutionary party of Indonesia (the Partai Nasional Indonesia or Partindo) had gone over to communist positions. The main goal of Communists in Indonesia, Musso believed, was now to set up a united front against Dutch imperialism. "What is uppermost for us now is to have a popular front in actuality," he said. He went on to say that he had succeeded in partly acquainting himself with the report made by Georgi Dimitrov at the Seventh Comintern Congress (Musso had left Moscow before the Congress had got down to work). He wrote that in the work to resurrect the Communist Party of Indonesia the recommendations contained in Dimitrov's report were of considerable benefit. Musso advised members of the communist group he had set up to join nationalist parties, youth, trade union and other organisations, for the purpose of establishing contact with the common people. Communists who came into contact with Musso continued to work in Partindo.

As a result of his trip to Indonesia (he remained there from 16 June 1935 to 1 May 1936, when he came back to Moscow), Musso succeeded in forming a small communist group. One member of the group conducted work in the trade unions, a second in nationalist parties, a third in religious parties and organisations, as well as among the peasants, and so on. The group carried on its main work in Surabaya. It established contact with sixteen other populated centres where, according to Musso, there existed communist groups. Almost all these centres were in Java.

Did Musso manage to resurrect a communist party in Indonesia? Evidently not. After his departure only three people remained in the group he had organised. True, each of them was in contact with groups of workers (Musso did not know the exact number of those groups). In 1937 Musso received information that the Dutch authorities had arrested 18 people for an attempt to reconstitute the Communist Party of Indonesia and had interned them in a concentration camp in New Guinea. By that time, Musso recalled later, contacts between the Comintern Executive and the group had been broken. In 1939 Musso received news from Indonesia. In that connection, he

informed the Executive that the group he had organised in 1935 was continuing its work led by Pamuji. Some members of the group set up by Musso during his stay in Indonesia in 1935 and 1936 later held responsible posts in the Communist Party of Indonesia.

So, attempts to resurrect the Communist Party of Indonesia did have some results. A small but compact association of Communists came into existence. A milestone had been passed on a hard road. On the whole, however, it has to be said that attempts to resurrect the party did not succeed. There was a lack of members; the Dutch colonialists mercilessly persecuted Communists, with the result that a prominent place in the anti-imperialist struggle was increasingly being taken by the national-revolutionary parties, the main rivals of Communists in vying for popular support. The Communist Party was only revived on a mass basis after World War II. It owed its considerable successes attained in the struggle for the people in the early postwar years largely to the united front policy drawn up with the assistance of the Communist International and the international communist movement.

## 2. COMINTERN AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA

As historical experience shows a communist movement arises in a particular country at a certain stage of its socio-economic and political development, as a result of an upsurge in class activity by the working people, and above all the proletariat, as a result of the work of the most class-conscious revolutionaries. That was also the case in India.

The importance of help and guidance from the Comintern for shaping the communist movement in India cannot be assessed without referring to the situation in the country. In 1919 the liberation movement had begun to acquire extensive scope. The British colonial authorities could do nothing to stop it.

The Indian National Congress (INC) was faced with a choice: either to become a mass organisation, not only advocating the national emancipation of India, but also in some way taking account of the economic and social demands of the working people, or to leave the movement of workers and peasants to its own devices. The latter course would have encouraged, no doubt, the emergence and rapid strengthening of political organisations of the working people, the INC's serious competitors. In that event the INC could be deprived of a mass basis. It took the first course. It equipped itself with the



ideology and tactics of Gandhism that was effective in India.

Gandhi was not simply a utopian who protested against industrial civilisation. Being a great patriot, he did not link the prospect for Indian liberation with the advantages for a particular class, a particular ethnic group, a particular caste, the adherents to a particular religion. But his social programme reflected in a specific, utopian form the aspirations of the most deprived sections of Indian society, and primarily the oppressed peasantry. The attainment of Indian independence on the basis of Gandhism could lead, of course, to the establishment of the political rule of bourgeois classes rather than of the working people. But Gandhi appealed to all social groups striving for independence. He encouraged the formation of broad sections of the Indian people in the fight against the colonialists. Non-violent forms of struggle were such only in relative terms. Gandhi's tactics consisted in relying on the people and putting the greatest possible and ever-mounting pressure on British imperialism, a pressure which would be exerted without bloody skirmishes (in conditions that prevailed at the time such armed encounters would have given the British upper hand), with priority use of those forms of struggle that corresponded to Indian traditions and specific conditions. The various classes and social groups of Indian society interested in national liberation saw Gandhi as their leader.

In the autumn of 1919, the INC session in Amritsar took a decision to begin organising a labour and trade union movement, as well as boycotting elections to the fictitious "self-governing institutions" envisaged by the 1919 Act (according to that act, entitled by the colonialists an "Indian Constitution", if any bill was proposed or amended so as to affect "the safety or tranquillity of British India or any part thereof", the Governor-General may stop it). The INC foiled the elections.

Gandhi worked out a stage-by-stage programme for conducting a campaign of non-cooperation (*satyagraha*) beginning in August 1920. This form of anti-imperialist movement envisaged various non-violent means of fighting against colonial rule: demonstrations, petitions, meetings, non-payment of taxes, boycott of foreign goods, refusal of Indian civil servants to perform their duties in the colonial state apparatus, etc. *Satyagraha* was by no means then an alternative to national revolution similar to that which occurred in China a few years later. In semi-colonial China militarist groups were at each other's throats. One of them was under the control of left-wing nationalist organisation (within which Communists worked). As a result revolution in

China possessed political leadership and was organised militarily. Nothing of the sort existed in India. The British controlled the situation in India, and individual spontaneous actions by the native population were every time put down by the regular forces and the police.

The INC action as organiser of *satyagraha* helped to convert it into a mass organisation. In late 1921 it had some ten million members. The INC was becoming a party of anti-British forces, although the most influential in it, of course, were national-bourgeois groups. That, however, did not preclude the possibility for those organisations of working people which took shape within the framework of the Congress to fight for political independence.

Workers and peasants in the *satyagraha* period were more and more frequently acting under INC slogans. Without taking part in the campaign of non-cooperation, begun by Gandhi and taken up by the Congress, the worker-peasant movement would possibly not have acquired the mass nature that it did. It also might have not gone for some time beyond common economic demands unconnected with anti-imperialist slogans. Participation in the anti-imperialist movement was an important school of political development for the workers and peasants of India. But, on the other hand, the bourgeois-nationalist leadership restrained the class development of the working people.

After an incident, in which peasants in their despair had attacked a police station and dealt savagely with the police, Gandhi, who felt that such excesses could only harm the movement, stopped the non-cooperation campaign in February 1922. Excitement in the country was running high, but the alternative to Gandhi's decision was apparently not a mass armed action and a victorious revolution, but more likely fierce repression of the popular movement by the colonialists, destruction of the INC and the forces of national liberation. After their retreat, Gandhi's supporters focused attention on the constructive programme which they put forward, proclaiming the need to regenerate in India traditional forms of production (hand spinning and weaving, etc.). The Congress had entered a period of crisis, but Gandhi's appeals enabled the INC to maintain contact with the people.

So, an end to the non-cooperation campaign in February 1922 should not be termed a defeat for Indian revolution for the simple reason that even at its highest point the national liberation movement in India at the beginning of the 1920s had not grown into revolution. But a decline in the mass



struggle was obvious. In 1923 only a few hundred thousand members remained in the Indian National Congress. A group of Swarajists, advocating the use of "self-governing institutions" for anti-colonial struggle took shape and gathered strength. Their prestige was undermined in 1926 by a grave setback at the polls for the "self-governing institutions". The left wing headed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose reinforced its position within the INC; it called on supporters to step up work among the people, suggested more widely applying Gandhi's tactics of civil non-cooperation and, at the same time, thought it possible to take part in elections. On the left's suggestion the INC passed a resolution in 1927 announcing complete independence of India the ultimate objective (hitherto it had spoken essentially of granting India dominion rights). Such in general outline were the conditions in which the activity of Indian Communists was beginning.

The Comintern based its attitude to Indian problems on the decisions of the Second Congress on the national and colonial questions, worked out and adopted under Lenin's guidance. The Eastern Section of the Comintern Executive Committee conducted the practical work; in the early years M. N. Roy took an active part in its activity. Ultra-revolutionary and sectarian views remained typical of Roy even after the Second Congress, but, of course, it was not Roy who determined the Comintern policy in regard to India.

On 17 October 1920 Roy organised in Tashkent the first Indian communist group (from revolutionary emigres). It took the name of the Indian Communist Party; its founder members were seven people, including M. N. Roy and Abani Mukherji. The group announced that it was in accord with Comintern principles and would begin to draw up a programme taking into account India's specific conditions. The first Indian Communists came from its ranks. Later on they were to render considerable assistance to the Comintern Executive Committee in establishing contacts with the communist movement in India. Some of them received training in the Communist University of Working People of the East. But the group organised by Roy in Tashkent did not become a Comintern section. The Communist Party of India (CPI) is quite right in dating its formation later—December 1925, when communist groups that had emerged and were operating in India itself united.

The communist movement in the East then possessed inherent and apparently irreconcilable elements: in intention decisively to distance itself from the nationalist forces—and the still

remaining nationalist aspirations; an appeal directly to the working people so as to attract them to its side—and insufficient ability to take their demands and mood into account; hopes for aid from the peasants—and attempts to attain their goals without the peasantry. Despite the existence of all manner of errors and deviations, the incipient communist movement in the East was moving forward, striving to apply in practice Marxist-Leninist theory which it was only just mastering. It encountered innumerable obstacles and had difficulty orienting itself in the most complex situation.

Two factors could help the communist parties and groups of the East in their ideological-political formation: on the one hand, there was the experience of their own political struggle, the theoretical and practical work; on the other there was the help and leadership of the Comintern.

In the early 1920s a few communist groups arose in India. As a rule, they had split off from the radical wing of the Indian National Congress and the trade unions. In mid-1922 Roy informed the Eastern Section of the Comintern Executive Committee that the League of Radical Congressmen party had been set up in Bombay and its leaders had sent him the brochure entitled "Gandhi vs. Lenin". He was referring to the well-known speech by Sripat Amrit Dange in April 1921. Roy was complimentary about the book whose contents showed that the author, a young Indian revolutionary, was changing to Marxist-Leninist positions. In late 1922 the above-mentioned group which Dange now headed had begun to call itself the Socialist Labour Party. The Comintern Eastern Section established contact with it through Roy. A communist group also came into existence in Madras. Chettiar Sringaravelu was most prominent there among the Communists. At the same time he was Chairman of the local National Congress committee; in his own words he had intended to travel to Moscow back in 1920 so as to take part in the Comintern Congress, but he had been unable to go.

Dange writes that "the news of the Russian revolution and the subsequent developments in the Soviet Union attracted" him to Marxism-Leninism. In the brochure "Gandhi vs. Lenin" Dange explained that he to a large extent "stood on the side of Lenin" in advocating defence of revolutionary changes of society.<sup>1</sup> Dange later recalled that he and those about him in the early 1920s had mastered national-revolutionary doctrines. The ending of the non-cooperation campaign had considerable

<sup>1</sup> See: *New Age*, 17 May 1964, p. 10.



importance for drawing leading fighters for Indian independence to communism. The most important notion through which Dange set up one of the first communist organisations of India was that of the leading role of the working class. At that time, he wrote, "we were not very clear about ourselves. We expected the Communist International to do something to guide us."<sup>1</sup> Already in December 1922 he had tried to unite the scattered communist groups into a communist party. Dange's group functioned in contact with left Congressmen and, in particular, with Bose.

In May 1922, the Comintern learned that a communist group had been set up in Bengal (Calcutta) as well, and established contact with it. Muzaffar Ahmad was the group's leader. It enjoyed support from Calcutta sailors and port workers. In 1959, Ahmad recalled, "It is needless to add that all of us were inspired by the Communist International." As he admitted, at that time when he was organising the Calcutta group, "My knowledge of Marxism was very superficial. But when I took the leap into the unknown, I counted on two things—my faith in the people and my unquestioned loyalty to the directives of the Communist International."<sup>2</sup> Another communist group sprang up in Lahore, this one headed by Ghulam Hussain, Secretary of the Union of North-West Railway Workers. The group published a monthly journal in Urdu.

The British colonial authorities launched repression against leading figures in the Indian communist movement. Between 1923 and 1924 the colonial police arrested the Indian Communists Dange, Ahmad, Hussain, Sringaravelu and several others. The authorities began to prepare a trial of Communists in Kanpur. In that situation the progressive journalist Satyabhakta, who had gradually been moving to Marxist positions, organised in September 1924 the legal National Communist Party of India in Kanpur.

In 1925, therefore, there already existed the Bombay, Calcutta, Lahore, Madras and Kanpur communist groups. Small groups and individual Communists also operated in other cities and provinces. According to Roy's statistics, in 1925 there were no more than 800 Communists in India. Comintern contacts with them at that time were irregular. Roy's letters to Indian

<sup>1</sup> S. A. Dange, S. V. Ghate, *Our First General Secretary*, Communist Party Publication, New Delhi, 1971, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Muzaffar Ahmad, *Communist Party of India. Years of Formation 1921-1933*, National Book Agency Private Limited, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 7, 8.

Communists were often intercepted by the police, and in 1922 Roy's emissary Charles Ashleigh who had been sent to Dange had been detained.

In 1923 Chettiar Sringaravelu founded the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Hindustan in Madras; its activity has been little studied up to now. The fact, however, that on 31 January 1924 it sent a telegram to its local sections is extremely significant; the contents of the telegram were as follows: "The Workers' and Peasants' Central Committee asks all its provincial organisations to mark the end of the week as a day of mourning for Comrade Nikolai Lenin, Chairman of the Federative Soviet Republic of Russian Workers. His death means that the workers of the world have lost a teacher and deliverer. A black flag flies at half-mast above the Party headquarters."

In the autumn of 1920 Roy organised in Tashkent a military school for Indian revolutionary emigres. He believed that Central Asia would be the arrival point of more and more groups of Indian emigres from which a revolutionary shock detachment could be formed. As he presumed, the detachment would make an incursion into Indian territory and arm the local population which would then rise up against the authorities. The military school did not last long (up to May 1921). Experience showed the whole recklessness and futility of Roy's "plan".<sup>1</sup>

On 3 January 1921 Roy and Mukherji sent a letter to Gandhi in Puna.

They informed him of the setting up in Soviet Russia of an organisation "for revolutionary work in India".<sup>2</sup> The organisation had been formed in Russia because of the "favourable opportunities existing here". Roy and Mukherji wrote: "You perhaps know of the Second Congress of the Communist International which took place in Moscow in August ... 1920, in the course of which the colonial theses read by Comrade Lenin and the Indian revolutionary known under the name of Roy showed that all peoples fighting for freedom against foreign rule should be granted assistance." The letter went on to say that, "The theses clearly stated that any revolutionary nationalist movement in countries under the sway of foreign imperialism could receive such assistance." As these words

<sup>1</sup> For more details see: M. A. Persits, *Revolutionaries of India in Soviet Russia. Mainsprings of the Communist Movement of the East*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1983, pp. 114-120.

<sup>2</sup> They evidently had in mind the communist group set up in Tashkent in October 1920.



show the letter allowed for the possibility, in principle, that a nationalist movement could be revolutionary.

The principal objective of the new organisation, wrote Roy and Mukherji, was to convene an All-India Revolutionary Congress of delegates from all revolutionary groups and tendencies in India. This congress would set up a "Central Revolutionary Party" which would receive "the assistance that can be rendered from here". The authors of the letter suggested to Gandhi that he take part in the coming congress and informed him of the establishment in Tashkent of the military school for Indian revolutionaries. They asked Gandhi to acquaint all "revolutionary organisations" with the contents of the letter and to spread among them the theses of the Second Comintern Congress on the national-colonial question.

It should be stated that the letter was over-optimistic about the prospects for Indian revolution and overemphasised the possibility of a shift of the Revolutionary Congress to the left, as well as the possibility of forming a new revolutionary mass party. Meanwhile its authors endeavoured to outline ways to implement the decisions of the Second Comintern Congress as applied to Indian conditions. Roy and Mukherji proposed to nationalists of India an agreement on concerted action, reckoning that all or part of them would act in a revolutionary way. The proposals contained in the letter were not an ultimatum.

What were the tactical and strategic propositions of the Comintern Executive in regard to the national liberation and communist movements of India?

In working out the programme documents which could be suggested to the nationalist organisations in India, the Executive increasingly focused attention on establishing a communist party there. In August 1921 the Small Bureau of the ECCI adopted a decision to empower a "small revolutionary group" (Indian) to take up the cause of communist propaganda in India.

A real communist party, the Executive believed, should be set up in India itself. The Comintern based itself on the notion that communist movement in India could not be "organised" from without; in a situation of upsurge in revolutionary feeling, the nucleus of a future communist organisation would arise precisely within the country. The Executive constantly tried to convince Roy of that, although he held to the view that the group of Communists operating outside India could become a leading force of the Indian revolution. Dange was right to say that the Communist Party of India, being part of the

world communist movement, could function and develop successfully only on Indian soil.

Meanwhile, Roy had done much to harm relations with those Indian revolutionary nationalists who were in the Soviet Union, maintained relations with the Comintern but had not moved to communist positions. They included Abdur Rabb Barq. In a letter to Georgi Chicherin in July 1921 he made the point that communist revolution was not to be expected in India soon; Roy had over-optimistically assessed prospects for social revolution. Barq protested at Roy's attempts to force revolutionary nationalists in Soviet Russia to accept the ideas of communism, in some degree transferring his irritation with Roy's actions to the Comintern as well.

In his evaluation of certain of Roy's views, Abdur Rabb Barq was quite right on many points. But one must remember that the dispute was not between a "left Communist" and a Communist taking up a proper position, but between a Communist and a non-Communist. Barq was not faced with the problems that stood before Roy. Being a revolutionary nationalist he had no thoughts of setting up a communist party.

In August 1921 a commission of the ECCI Small Bureau came to the conclusion that of all the principal groups of Indian revolutionaries only Roy's group was ready for "acting on a communist basis". The extent of that readiness, perhaps, was exaggerated, but on the whole the commission was right: neither the Indian Revolutionary Association headed by Abdur Rabb Barq and M. P. T. Acharya, nor the group headed by Chattopadhyaya and Luhani were communist. The task was now to work out ways to promote the communist movement in India. Roy did not see the whole complexity of that task, while the nationalist-revolutionaries did not even set themselves such a task.

The Small Bureau commission recommended the Comintern to grant direct assistance to nationalist organisations in India if the opportunity was to present itself. The letter by Roy and Mukherji to Gandhi, the proposal of the Small Bureau commission and the August decision of the Small Bureau were all links in Comintern activity in carrying out the decisions of the Second Comintern Congress.

At the end of 1921 Roy and Mukherji sent a message to the Ahmadabad session of the Indian National Congress.<sup>1</sup> In the main the message said that India was facing a great polit-

<sup>1</sup> See: *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol. 1, 1917-1922, New Delhi, 1970, pp. 341-54 (further on referred to as *Documents...*).



ical, economic and social revolution. The popular movement was being led by the INC, which had taken that "great mission" upon itself. The Indian National Congress had become the political organisation and leader of national liberation. It had to rely on the common people, to have its finger on the pulse of the people. The National Congress had put forward the slogan of swaraj (self-government), but that was not enough; what was needed was to lead the people under the banner of swaraj. The INC should think about these needs. Indian working people wanted to eat at least twice a day, but they were deprived of that opportunity. The INC needed to remember that if it wished to rely on the majority of the people. Therefore the INC should concern itself not only with the interests of just one class—the merchants and industrialists; otherwise the workers and peasants would form their own political party. Hence, the message said, the INC should equip itself with the demands and slogans of the worker and peasant trade unions.

In this document, Roy and Mukherji obviously went further than in their previous letter to Gandhi. They expected that their message would induce the Congress leaders to more decisive action, to a more consistent fight for the urgent interests of workers and peasants. In itself that idea was realistic. It corresponded to the political line of the Third Comintern Congress and to a united front policy, clearly formulated by the ECCI in late 1921. But at the same time, the message was shot through with the idea that conditions could appear at any time in India for setting up a new national organisation. In that sense the message markedly reflected the views of Roy who did not believe in the progressive possibilities of the Indian National Congress. Roy and Mukherji wrote to the INC that the vertical lines of social division of Indian society (into castes, religions, creeds, etc.) were wearing away, and the gap was widening between the "two great classes". But the gap was not widening as swiftly as the authors of the message thought; the classes were not as big and in India there were by no means only two classes. Besides, the proletariat as a class had certainly not formed completely.

In December 1922, a message to the regular INC session then meeting in Gaya was drawn up by the Comintern Executive Committee on behalf of the Presidium of the Fourth Congress. It spoke of the most important directions of Comintern policy in regard to the national liberation, labour and communist movement in India. It noted that the delegates of the Gaya session were "representatives of the Indian people" and the

Communist International heartily supported the Indian people in its struggle for liberation; it described the feudal landowning class as an ally of imperialism and a foe of the Indian people.

The message was fully in line with the tactical principles of Marxism-Leninism, according to which the major blow should be struck against the most reactionary forces and any split of interests of the ruling classes should be used. The Comintern message also contained the following idea: the anti-imperialist struggle could be successful only in conjunction with the popular struggle for resolving the tasks of the *democratic, anti-feudal revolution*. The Comintern Executive had never divorced the task of national liberation from the goal of that revolution. Roy (at least at the Second Comintern Congress) had posed the question differently: *either* national struggle *or* the movement of working and exploited people. The prominent Indian Communist Gangadhar M. Adhikari remarked that Lenin in his dispute with M. N. Roy had indicated the need to combine both aspects of the liberation struggle and never to permit the national liberation movement developing in the colonies and dependencies to be counterposed to the movement of workers and peasants.<sup>1</sup> The Comintern strictly adhered to that only correct position. Its message to the INC was an attempt to spell that out in concrete terms.

Further, the Executive Committee drew the National Congress's attention to the fact that the "evolutionary nationalism" typical of the leaders of the propertied classes narrowed the tasks of the national movement to the demand for autonomy within the British Empire. In other words, the Comintern was posing the question as follows: in order for anti-imperialist nationalism to be effective it had to be revolutionary, to rely on the people. Right-wing elements within the INC, the message emphasised, were clashing with the aspiration not only of the people of India, but of the rest of the National Congress. The sections of the population, by dint of their economic interests standing opposed to British imperialism, were forming, wrote the Comintern, "the overwhelming majority of the nation, since they include the bankrupt middle classes, pauperised peasantry and the exploited workers".<sup>2</sup> The Comintern highly assessed the achievements of the INC in launching the anti-imperialist struggle, yet reproached INC

<sup>1</sup> See: G. Adhikari, "Lenin on Roy's Supplementary Colonial Theses", *Marxist Miscellany*, Delhi, 1970, No. 1, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents...*, pp. 573-77.



leadership in lagging behind the upsurge in the liberation movement. The Comintern drew INC leaders' attention to the need for them to formulate their programme in line with the requirements and demands of the great bulk of the nation. The message ended with the calls: "Down with British Imperialism!" and "Long live the free people of India!"

The Comintern then regarded the INC as a field of struggle for the people. It undoubtedly saw ever-mounting popular pressure in the INC as a paramount task of the communist movement that was forming in India; this had to lead to an intensification of its left wing; Communists and the progressive group in the INC, the Comintern felt, should join together in a united front. The Comintern recommendations to the INC fully accorded with that course.<sup>1</sup> It combined revolutionary spirit and realism in its document: in the movement being led by the INC it saw a force in whose success Communists were directly interested.<sup>2</sup>

The INC session in Gaya received also another document—an extensive draft action programme drawn up by M. N. Roy. The

<sup>1</sup> *Documents...*, pp. 573-77.

<sup>2</sup> The Comintern consistently and resolutely rejected the viewpoint according to which the inability, observed in certain historical circumstances, of non-proletarian (intermediate) socio-political groups to take revolutionary action was allegedly absolutely in tune with the interests of the proletariat and its party. Trotsky and his supporters had long ago challenged the Comintern with that notion. They maintained that if all the non-proletarian (intermediate) forces were unable to campaign for any progressive objectives whatsoever, so much the better. As a result, Communists and the proletariat would become "already now" the only embodiment of any progress; they would concentrate within themselves all the energy of society's onward development. Therefore, from the viewpoint of the proponents of "permanent revolution", the coming of the proletariat to power was *in all circumstances and at any stage of revolution* the only possible resolution of problems of all remaining classes and social groups discontent with the existing system. Such a resolution would be accelerated a hundredfold by the political impotence of those classes and groups. That, therefore, would constitute a necessary condition for the proletariat's victory. History, however, confirmed the thesis of Marxist-Leninist theory: the revolutionary process develops ultimately more effectively and rapidly if the non-proletarian (intermediate) classes and sections realise more fully their progressive potential. This realisation takes place, naturally, in a reformist as well as revolutionary way. Sectarians, however, take a dim view of any reforms which, they believe, hamper revolution. But counteraction to progressive measures of other, non-proletarian classes and forces hampers the revolution to an incomparably greater degree. The Trotskyite point of view in fact was reduced to just such a "recommendation" to Communists: in the hope that all problems would be resolved at one blow, to oppose perfectly realistic socio-economic and political changes of a progressive nature. In actuality, that should lead to the isolation of Communists from the people, put them in a position of being an anti-popular force rather than a national leader.

programme may be reduced to the following: the attainment of full national independence, the establishment of a national government on the basis of universal suffrage, elimination of landowners' possessions, nationalisation of the land, establishment of maximum rent payments, institution of agricultural banks, removal of all indirect taxes and introduction of a progressive income tax, nationalisation of the mines, the railways, establishment of the minimum bracket for wages and an eight-hour working day, universal arming of the people, etc. The programme also indicated methods of struggle: the setting up of militant peasant organisations, mass workers' demonstrations and strikes (it was thought that the strikers would receive material help from the INC funds).<sup>1</sup>

While the Comintern message to the INC spearheaded it for attaining mass support, so as to resolve the tasks of the National Congress and intensify its left wing, the draft programme was a document designed (according to Roy) to split the National Congress and encourage the formation of a new national-revolutionary party, while the INC was a party representing the alliance of national-reformist and national-revolutionary elements. It was intended not to help move the INC to the left, but to split it and take control of its left wing. And not simply to take charge of the left wing, but to use it merely as a legal "cover" for the Communist Party of India. Roy believed that a future communist party would straightaway become a mass party and immediately occupy leading positions within the national liberation struggle.

It is easy to see that the draft programme compiled by Roy contradicted the Comintern line and did not accord with the real situation in the country. The Comintern oriented communist groups in India on creating a united party so that it could work within the INC, in a mass organisation which was headed by national-bourgeois circles and within which a struggle was in progress for domination between various political orientations, and so that it could extend and strengthen its influence among the people and radicalise the National Congress as a whole. Roy's idea was that the INC was falling apart and Communists would with ease quickly organise a national-revolutionary party to take its place under their leadership. That

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 577-88. The draft programme was published in a newspaper put out by Roy in Europe, as well as printed in the form of a leaflet that ended up in India in December 1922; on 21 December Reuters News Agency communicated its contents to India.



was a mistake. One should not, however, forget that the popularity of the INC at that time, after the end of the civil non-cooperation campaign, had considerably diminished. It is possible that Roy believed that the Indian National Congress could expect the same fate as the Indonesian Sarekat Islam.

As mentioned earlier, the first Workers' and Peasants' Party was set up in 1923 in Madras (on 1 May, on the day when May Day was first celebrated on Indian soil). At first it was assumed that such parties would arise in many other provinces, and then a conference of their members could be held in Lakhnau. It was expected that the conference would be attended by communist delegates from Bombay, Calcutta and Kanpur, by leaders of the peasant movement from the United Provinces, the Punjab and Madras, and also by eminent INC leaders. None of these hopes were to be realised. There was still no united communist party in India, while other organisations of working people were attracted by the Congress and remained within its orbit.

At the end of 1922 the Eastern Section document (Presidium Report) noted the crisis of the national movement and the spontaneous emergence of communist groups in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. The document said that it was of prime importance for Communists in India "to set up a communist party powerful enough through the worker and peasant movement to take over leadership of the national struggle". The colonial possessions in India were at that time one of the most important props of British imperialism, and the absence of a communist party ultimately was having an adverse effect on the world struggle against capital and on its prospects. The Comintern Executive posed the question of setting up a communist party in India before it did so in regard, for example, to the Philippines or Indochina.

The Fifth Plenum of the Enlarged Comintern Executive which met between March and April 1925 discussed in detail the situation in India and adopted an extensive resolution "On Work in India". The national liberation movement in India, the Plenum said, was at the crossroads. Repression by the colonial authorities, contradictions inherent in the national parties all went to weaken the organised resistance of the Indian people to British imperialism. The task of Communists was to stimulate the national liberation movement through a resolute struggle for the independence of India. The Plenum came to the conclusion that there was a tendency to organisation of those integral parts of the national movement which were

not following the Swarajists—many of the petty bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, students, workers and peasants. Communists, the Plenum stressed, should continue their work in the INC and, in particular, among left-wing Swarajists, as well as within other national organisations for "establishing a mass national-revolutionary party and an all-India anti-imperialist alliance"; it was necessary to set up a popular party whose slogans would be separation from the empire, a democratic republic, universal suffrage and abolition of feudal relations. The "more progressive part of the bourgeoisie" would back such a party. The resolution noted: success in establishing an anti-imperialist alliance may be achieved only if the communist groups of India unite in a single working-class party. "The Communists of India can only play an active part in organising and leading the revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle if they are a well organised, politically conscious vanguard of the working class, clearly aware of the historic importance of the movement for national liberation and in close cooperation with the world proletariat (especially with the British workers)." The Comintern encouraged the unification of communist groups into a party, oriented them on work within the INC, proposed its own cooperation to the INC and, in line with the policy of creating a national-revolutionary party within the framework of the National Congress, restrained Roy from his extremism.

In September 1924 Satyabhakta, who had set up in Kanpur the legal Indian Communist Party, announced the convocation within three months of an All-India Communist Conference (preparations for which took, however, more than a year). He published draft programme documents which said that Communists should advocate three principal goals: to attain India's national independence, to establish a society of social justice and to organise a new state representing the interests of the working people. Nothing was said in the documents of a transitional period between the gaining of national independence and the creation of a socialist state. The authors believed that the liberation movement of the Indian people would resolve those tasks simultaneously.

The idea of calling a unity conference had been voiced earlier, so its convocation was essentially a matter of several communist groups.<sup>1</sup> The Conference met between 25 and 26 December 1925 in Kanpur. As Adhikari writes, all genuinely

<sup>1</sup> See: S. A. Darge, S. V. Ghate..., p. 13.



communist groups were represented at it.<sup>1</sup> Sringaravelu Chettiar took the chair at the Conference. In his opening address he did not pose the question of the new party affiliating to the Comintern. As Soviet research has shown, this stance was tactically correct in view of the circumstances in which the Conference met and could not be construed as anti-Comintern. The Conference was meeting legally, which enabled Communists widely to propagate their views. But if they had revealed their intention of making the party a section of the Comintern the Conference would have been dispersed, the new party would have been smashed straightaway, its leaders thrown into prison and, thus, the Conference would not have performed its main function of constituting the party.

In Chettiar's opinion, Communists ought to take part in the struggle for national liberation. Self-government won as a result, he believed, would be proletarian and not bourgeois. In other words, a direct consequence of the anti-imperialist revolution, as expected, would have to be a socialist state. Did that testify merely to an inability to approach revolution as a stage-by-stage process? By no means. Of course, Chettiar (like many other Indian Communists) was over-optimistic about the real balance of class and political forces in the country and simplified the path to the socialist goal. But in order to have a proper understanding of the step-by-step development of revolution one had, of course, to be clear about its final goals. Only then could one think of stages along the way to it. Many Indian Communists were only bringing their views into a system, including those on the goal of revolution, the ways and means of attaining it.

Although the INC was a bourgeois organisation, thought Chettiar, under Gandhi's leadership it had acquired great popularity during the non-cooperation movement; "the active cooperation of the organised labour is necessary for any party bent upon achieving swaraj."<sup>2</sup> The Congress was nevertheless insufficiently consistent in organising and educating the workers. Communists had to take that upon themselves. At the same time Chettiar thought it necessary for Communists to have a hand in the work of the Congress.

On 26 December the Conference adopted the Party Constitu-

tion. The Preamble to the Constitution proclaimed the formation of the Communist Party of India as a party whose ultimate goal was to be the liberation of workers and peasants. "The immediate object of the party shall be the securing of a living wage for the workers and peasants."<sup>1</sup> In the campaign to implement its ideals and its programme of direct action, the Constitution said, the Party would enter into cooperation with other political parties, but would also act independently. The Party would use all legal forms of work. The Constitution also noted that "the party shall consist of Communists only who will pledge themselves to carry out its objects."<sup>2</sup> It envisaged the formation of five provincial Party centres—Calcutta, Bombay, Kanpur, Madras and Lahore. On 28 December the communist participants in the Conference chose the Central Executive Committee composed of members of the main communist groups.

Problems of the liberation movement in India were discussed in March 1926 once again at the Sixth Plenum of the Enlarged ECCI. It underlined in its resolution that "No one save Communists are able to lead the Indian proletariat in a historic struggle for national independence and social liberty." It still had not had objective information on the Kanpur Conference (Roy was largely to blame for that), and so the resolution noted that the many attempts that had been made to unite the scattered communist groups had been so far unsuccessful. As the most important task of Indian Communists the Plenum nominated the setting up of a strong communist party on the basis of the existing communist groups. It underlined the importance of work by Indian Communists within the unions so as to turn the All-India Trade Union Congress "into a militant proletarian organisation". The Plenum noted that the peasantry, whom the proletariat was to lead, would be a decisive factor for the destiny of the Indian revolution. Therefore, Indian Communists were recommended to adopt a detailed programme of work among the peasant masses so as to unite the various peasant organisations into a single general national organisation under the influence of Communists. "National liberation remains a burning political problem," the ECCI emphasised. The Plenum noted the compromise "between the upper sections of native bourgeoisie and imperialism". A simplified approach to the complex problem of class differentiation of Indian society was alien to the

<sup>1</sup> See: G. Adhikari, "The First Indian Communist Conference", *Marxist Miscellany*, No. 4, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol. 2, 1923-1925, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 649, 650.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 668.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem.*



Comintern Executive Committee: "Recognition of the proletariat as the overwhelming factor in the struggle against imperialism should not lead to underestimating the role of social classes that lie between the *big* [my italics—A.R.] bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Those intermediate classes form the overwhelming majority of the population and are the victims of capitalist exploitation." In the opinion of the Executive Committee, the formation of a revolutionary-nationalist organisation whose social support would be the middle classes, the intelligentsia, petty bourgeoisie and peasantry was still on the agenda in India. Indian Communists had to enter that organisation as the most active force so as later to occupy a vanguard position in the popular struggle for national emancipation. The revolutionary-nationalist organisation was to arise as a result of work within the INC by Communists, but they should not strive to "seize" leadership of it. That point of view was close to Executive Committee conclusions in relation to Indonesia. It felt it impermissible, we may recall, for Indonesian Communists to try to "seize" leading posts in the national-revolutionary organisation which might arise in the future.

The Comintern recommended Indian Communists to do the following: to work within the INC; to form an alliance with its left-wing groups for the purpose of putting pressure on the right; to strengthen the left wing of the Congress, so that it went over to national-revolutionary positions. The Comintern advised Indian Communists to act within the Congress so that the organisation would begin to fight for the vital interests of the working people. At the same time, Comintern believed, Communists should fortify and extend their own influence and mass base within the INC; that way (acting "*wherever the masses are to be found*") they would be able to establish a broad revolutionary organisation on the basis of the Congress's left wing; to influence its policy, but by no means try to "seize" control of it or "turn" it into a communist party. This plan radically differed from the scheme that Roy had proposed: to recommend demands that were unacceptable to the Congress and thereby to "expose" it in the people's eyes, to draw the people into an organisation set up and straightaway led by Communists. While the Comintern was suggesting to Communists a fundamentally rational path to vanguard role within the national movement, even though at that time it to a certain extent underestimated the length and difficulty of that path, Roy's scheme was absolutely unrealistic.

On 1 December 1926 the Communist Party of India brought

out A Manifesto to the All-India National Congress, which criticised the Swarajists for their parliamentary illusions: "The Swaraj Party cannot rescue itself from the deadening grip of bourgeois influence."<sup>1</sup> Communists sharply criticised the moderate demand for India to be given dominion rights and indicated the community of interests of Hindu and Muslim workers. The Manifesto expressed the attitude of Indian Communists to the national bourgeoisie. The train of thought of the authors of the document in general outline was as follows. The Indian bourgeoisie could not implement aspirations for domination without challenging imperialism; on the other hand, fear of the popular movement would lead it to betray national interests for the sake of class interests by collaborating with imperialism. At first glance the Manifesto contained a sectarian conclusion on the "nationalist bourgeoisie". It was described as "a new ally of imperialism". But by the term "nationalist bourgeoisie", as the Manifesto text clearly demonstrates, it understood only the top ranks of the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy. Indian Communists did not reject hope of exciting wide sections of the bourgeois classes to a more decisive struggle against imperialism. The Congress programme, as the Manifesto indicated, should contain such demands as national independence, a republic, national assembly elected by universal adult suffrage; transfer of land to the tillers; an eight-hour day and minimum living wage; the right for workers and peasants to combine and to strike, etc. The Communist Party of India proposed to National Congress members that they make two points the centre of their programme: national independence and complete democratisation of national life in every respect. Beneath the Manifesto was the signature: "The Communist Party of India".<sup>2</sup>

The text of this document important in the Party's history testifies that Indian Communists who penned the Manifesto were ready to cooperate with the National Congress (on the basis of anti-imperialist and democratic demands). The Comintern advice evidently played no small part in that. Representatives of fraternal parties in the Comintern leadership back in August 1926 had got in touch with Indian Communists through the medium of British Communist Party figures journeying to India, orienting the Indian Party on work within patriotic organisations so as

<sup>1</sup> *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol. 3, 1926, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 236-47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.



to strengthen the left wing of the latter, on every possible use of progressive opportunities in such organisations, on radicalisation of the Congress under popular influence. That policy, the Comintern believed, would be effective only if the Indian Party were to be a united party enjoying the backing of the people, and above all the industrial workers. That was how the Comintern saw the way for the party to win a leading position within the national liberation movement.

A Communist Party conference took place in Bombay in May 1927. The Party Executive Committee reported, in particular, that Kanpur was a centre of the incipient communist movement in India: Satyabhakta had succeeded in setting up an Indian Communist Party whose ideology, however, was not yet fully Marxist. The Communist Party had been set up in Kanpur in 1925 at a conference that had taken place under the leadership of genuinely communist groups. Indian Communists had seen their task primarily in stimulating left-wing forces of the INC and the All-India Trade Union Congress.

The Bombay conference adopted a new Communist Party Constitution which stated, in particular, that a Party member could only be a person who accepted the programme of the Communist International.<sup>1</sup> A Foreign Bureau of the Party was set up which was to operate in line with the Party programme and decisions. According to the Constitution the Party was to hold annual congresses and formulate its programme and policy at them; it was to conduct work within the INC and the All-India Trade Union Congress. It also adopted a resolution entitled "The Communist Party of India appeals to world communist parties and the International for leadership and guidance in work carried out by the Party within the country". The Party programme adopted at the conference contained the demand for swaraj. The Party called on all its members to enter the INC and to help set up a left wing in it, to cooperate with radical nationalists on the basis of the minimum programme (full national independence, a democratic republic on the basis of universal suffrage, elimination of landowning farming, reform of the taxation system, industrialisation of the country, establishment of the eight-hour day and minimum wages, etc.). From an analysis of material from the Bombay conference it would seem that the minimum programme worked out by the Comintern in the early 1920s continued to be used by Indian

<sup>1</sup> It is clear from the Executive Committee report that the Party had not yet joined the Comintern.

Communists as a means of exerting an influence on the INC from the left, as a means of radicalising it.

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After the Kanpur Conference Indian Communists did a great deal to set up and operate legal workers' and peasants' parties, which they understood as an alternative to the national-reformist organisations, not to the Communist Party. As far as the question of "stability" of the Indian National Congress (as of Sarekat Islam in Indonesia) was concerned, it could only be resolved in the course of the struggle itself.

In the period 1925-1927 several workers' and peasants' parties sprang up in Bengal, Bombay, the United Provinces and the Punjab. They were first established as left-wing nationalist organisations of workers and peasants within the INC; later Communists began to take over the leadership of them. But such parties did not last long. The main reason was the terror launched by the British authorities and the presence of a very powerful rival in the traditional Congress organisations. Moreover, individual Communist Party leaders entered the leadership of workers' and peasants' parties, striving to lend them simultaneously a mass character, and shift them to communist positions. These two aspects were simply incompatible in Indian conditions of the time. These tactics undoubtedly belong to those "sectarian mistakes" to the existence of which in the late 1920s and early 1930s Indian Communists themselves indicated later, and led to a situation where the mass base of the workers' and peasants' parties began to narrow. Moreover, the implementation by Communists of leadership of the workers' and peasants' parties was understood by some of them as control over the legal party apparatus by the illegal (and, after all, it was against such ideas and the practical actions emanating from them that the Comintern had warned).

The Comintern Executive, attentively studying the prospects for the workers' and peasants' parties in India, experienced increasing doubts about the expediency of that form of organisation; it feared that work to create such parties might nonetheless hamper the organisation of a united communist party; what is more, it was not sure about the proper effectiveness of the activity of such parties within the INC. Meanwhile their existence was a real fact; taking this into consideration, the Executive Committee made recommendations on the subject of the workers' and peasants' parties.

In December 1927, the Comintern prepared a letter to the



Central Committee of the workers' and peasants' party of Bengal. Above all it pointed out that the formation of a workers' and peasants' party by no means signified the "elimination of the communist party". It emphasised the need to preserve and safeguard the ideological-political and organisational independence of the Communist Party of India. That was a correct, timely and very important piece of advice. It also recommended combining illegal forms of struggle with legal ones and to strive for the right to a legal existence. At the same time, it felt that the major dangers for Indian Communists were legalism and adoption of bourgeois nationalist positions. Finally, the letter clearly expressed the view that the workers' and peasants' party should not be simply a "legal cover" for the Communist Party. To avoid that, wrote the Executive Committee, it was sufficient merely to change the name and have only one party with legal and underground organisations. Further, the workers' and peasants' party was a gathering point for all exploited elements in society (the proletariat, peasantry and petty bourgeoisie) which were to combine in the revolutionary struggle against foreign imperialism and local reaction; the programme of such a party should not and could not be communist. It had to be a programme of democratic revolution.

The First All-India Conference of Workers' and Peasants' Parties was held in Calcutta in December 1928; it adopted a policy of attracting the revolutionary sections of the INC into those parties. The Comintern sent a message to the conference. It supported the revolutionary movements of working and oppressed people, and therefore welcomed the conference of parties fighting against imperialist tyranny and feudal reaction at one of the most important sectors of the world anti-imperialist front. However, it expressed its doubt about whether the workers' and peasants' parties were an expedient and effective form of organisation. It believed that the revolutionary worker-peasant alliance should arise not in the form of a united worker-peasant party, but on the basis of actual cooperation between the proletarian party and peasant allies (the Comintern was trying to avoid the dissolution of the recently formed Communist Party of India in non-communist worker-peasant organisations). In regard to an evaluation of the political situation in India, the Comintern felt at the time that the country was confronted by a national revolution whose aim was to overthrow the foreign yoke; the working class, peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie would be the moving forces of that revolution. Again and again the Comintern

stressed the need for an independent political party of the working class.

A "reorganisation" of united parties into the Communist Party took place at the Calcutta Conference, and its new Executive Committee was elected. Soon after, by decision of the Executive Committee the workers' and peasants' parties were declared disbanded so that part of their membership could be accepted into the Communist Party of India, turning it into a relatively mass party. The British colonialists realised what danger that posed for them. In a few days the authorities of British India arrested 31 activists of the Communist Party in various areas of the country and began to prepare a trial of "communist conspirators" (it became known as the Meerut Conspiracy Case). The Party was once again the victim of repression.

In October 1929 the Comintern Executive returned to the question of the communist movement in India—on the basis of the assessments of the Sixth Congress which had met a year earlier. The ECCI decision contained the conclusion that the Indian bourgeoisie had come right up to a capitulation deal with capitalism, while the working class had already become the decisive force of revolutionary upsurge. The national bourgeoisie was covering up its capitulation to imperialism by left-wing phrases. That was a contradictory evaluation. On the one hand, the Comintern Executive did not think it possible to state that a deal between imperialism and Indian national-bourgeois groups had already been made; on the other hand, the fact that the deal had not yet occurred was explained merely by tactical considerations on the part of the Indian national bourgeoisie. At that time the Comintern upheld the slogan of a worker-peasant republic which was to be won through anti-imperialist struggle under proletarian leadership.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It had recommended this slogan to several communist parties in oppressed countries in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The slogan appeared as a result of changes in Comintern policy consolidated by decisions of the Sixth Congress (see Chapter 3). There were, however, specific factors motivating the ECCI to modify its tactics in regard to the liberation movement in India to a greater degree than to other oppressed countries. The labour movement in India at that time was stronger than in any other country of the East; the development of capitalist relations had gone much farther than in the Philippines, Indonesia or Indochina; the specific Indian phenomenon of Gandhian ideology reflecting the aspirations and sentiments of the widest sections of the Indian people, being on the whole a factor of great anti-imperialist force, often appeared in its political aspect as a tactic of manoeuvre; and as such at that time was interpreted by Communists mainly as capitulation of Indian nationalism to imperialism.



The most important aspect of the Comintern Executive Committee decision was that it focused attention on the need to strengthen the Communist Party of India, to win to its side the working class through work within the unions, to intensify work among the peasants while associating tasks of an agrarian revolution with the movement for independence. In that decision the Comintern, while expressing the idea that a split in the reformist Trade Union Congress was not a severe setback to the labour movement, all the same thought it necessary to stress that the split did not meet the interests of Communists and that the latter should safeguard the unity of the trade union movement.

In April 1930 the Comintern Presidium discussed the question of the communist movement in India. Leader of the Eastern Secretariat Otto Kuusinen made the report. Examination of the question, he said, was associated with a sharp upsurge in the revolutionary movement in India. Historical experience, he declared, fully bore out the correctness of the conclusions of the Sixth Congress in condemning the "decolonisation theory", according to which the industrialisation of India would lead to the complete fusion of interests of the Indian national bourgeoisie and imperialism; it had not committed ultimate national betrayal and was still capable of fighting for the independence of India. The "eleven demands" which Gandhi had presented to the British, said Kuusinen, were by no means "imaginary".<sup>1</sup> What particularly worried the Eastern Secretariat was the fact that the Communist Party of India was still a small organisation.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s the Communist Party of India ran into considerable difficulties: repressions by the colonial regime, weakening of party influence in the unions, intensification of sectarian tendencies and factional activity within the Party. As a result the Party was unable to take effective part in the mass anti-imperialist struggle in the early 1930s. The decision of the Presidium of the Thirteenth ECCI Plenum, "Tasks of the Communist Party of India", held in December 1933, was of considerable

importance for overcoming the crisis within the Party. This document put before Indian Communists the demand swiftly to stop the factional struggle and to set up central leading agencies of the Party.<sup>1</sup> The ECCI oriented Indian Communists on stimulating work within the national-reformist trade unions; at that time the Comintern had come to the conclusion that it was necessary for Communists to launch an energetic activity in uniting red trade unions with the unions under INC influence. At the same time, the Comintern underlined that Communists should continue to expose national-reformists. In itself this proposition was by no means "left-wing". The leftist coating was expressed otherwise: it was thought that national-reformism had entered a crisis from which it was not likely to recover, and the most dangerous national-reformists were those who stood on the left flank. Events did not bear out that viewpoint, which resulted from an insufficiently realistic assessment of the situation. If a revolutionary situation was taking shape in the country, if national-reformism really was in a state of crisis and decay, if there really were enough objective prerequisites for the working class to come to power then, of course, left national-reformism, which had the support of the radicalised ordinary people, was bound to be seen by Communists as their direct rival and enemy, the last bastion of reformism and, therefore, the last bastion of British possessions in India. In fact things were quite different.

In the autumn of 1934 the Comintern sent the Communist Party of India a fresh letter expressing the idea of flexible and sensible tactics of a united front. The Indian National Congress, the letter said, was continuing to act before the people as a centre organising general national opposition to imperialism. It was leading considerable numbers of workers, wide sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry. However, the INC was pursuing a collaborationist policy in relation to imperialism; at the same time it was experiencing popular pressure upon it. Hence the political struggle within the Congress.

In 1934 the Comintern Executive was steadily coming to the conclusion that the INC should be regarded as a colourful mixture of diverse political forces. The documents, decisions, theoretical analysis and practical activity of the Comintern

<sup>1</sup> The major demands reflecting popular aspirations in India and published by Gandhi at the end of January 1930 were to reduce land tax by 50 per cent, to revoke the government salt monopoly and the tax on salt, to grant Indian citizens the right to bear arms for self-defence and to liberate political prisoners.

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Otto Kuusinen thought it necessary to emphasise that those who believed that India had no Communist Party at all were wrong.

<sup>1</sup> That was done in 1933-1934.



in the period of political change which had started in 1934 show that there is a complex combination of elements of old and new tactics. Such a combination found expression in the letter sent by the Comintern Executive to the Communist Party of India in the autumn of 1934. On the one hand, the letter regarded the stepping up of Congress activity against colonial rule as a political manoeuvre. On the other, it felt that the gravest danger for the Communist Party of India was to separate the struggle against national-reformism from that of national liberation, from the fight for everyday demands of the workers and peasants.

Meanwhile, the Comintern noted, that separation did exist in the Party's practical activity. It drew attention to the impermissibility of attempts to counterpose "the general and direct calls for anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution under proletarian hegemony" to the mass anti-imperialist movement developing under Congress leadership. Arriving at the conclusion that sectarianism was the most serious drawback of the communist movement in India, the Comintern summoned Communists resolutely to turn to the people and to "be able to find a common tongue with the mass of workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie who had not yet shaken free of national reformism but were coming to it through innumerable vacillations, retreats and zigzags". The Comintern recommended the Communist Party of India to accept the tactics of uniting all forces both in the fight against imperialism and the onslaught of capital, and in the fight against the landowners and usurers. These tactics should become, the letter said, a means of struggle for the proletariat's leading and organising role in the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution. At that time the Comintern had not yet posed the question of an alliance between the Communist Party of India and the Indian National Congress or of the entry of Communists into the INC; but even then it was proposing to examine the Congress organisations as a legal opportunity for setting up a wide militant anti-imperialist front and for winning the people to the CPI's side. In that connection, it recommended to the Provisional Central Committee of the Communist Party of India and to its local committees to propose (through communist sections) to left-wing trade unions and anti-imperialist organisations close to the Communists to join local Congress organisations through collective membership and to send their representatives to its bodies, without setting any preconditions save concerted struggle against imperialism. "The minimum

platform of united front in the anti-imperialist struggle", as one section of the letter put it, recommended the following: complete independence of India, revoking of all anti-democratic and anti-worker laws, freedom for political prisoners, fight against any reduction in wages and the sacking of workers, against the seizure of peasant lands for debts. The "minimum platform", however, included also a categorical demand "to stop all talks with British imperialism".

On the initiative of the Comintern Eastern Secretariat the CPI Provisional Central Committee, through the revolutionary Girni Kamgar trade union, suggested uniting all textile workers unions on the basis of a general action against lower wages and for securing trade union democracy. It recommended also the All-India Executive Committee of the Red Trade Union Congress to propose to the Executive Committee of the national-reformist congress a merger of both union centres. That recommendation was accepted and the union centres merged in April 1935.

Decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress were of exceptional importance for promoting the communist movement in India, orienting the Party on a policy of a united anti-imperialist front.

We may recall that back in late 1929 the Indian National Congress had announced its aim of complete independence for India. After the British regime had refused to make any concessions to the Congress, Gandhi had begun to carry out a civil disobedience programme. In March 1930 there began a demonstrative violation of the law on government salt monopoly (without permission people began to make their own salt). A wave of popular protest demonstrations rolled over the country in April and May. People picketed shops selling British goods, Indian civil servants refused to do their duty and business life came to a standstill in the cities. Workers, peasants, merchants and office employees all took part in the campaign. The 1930-1931 civil disobedience campaign gained support among wide sections of the people and went beyond non-violent resistance. In many parts of India uprisings broke out and were put down by the colonialists by force of arms. The cruel repression even extended to those taking part in peaceful actions.

In the situation of subsequent decline in the national liberation movement, right-wing elements in the INC, fearing revolutionary popular activity, made a deal with the colonialists. The Communists being persecuted by the authorities and



having worked in the most difficult conditions, and up to 1933 having been deprived of central leadership, experienced an understandable distrust of the influential group of right-wing collaborationist Congressmen and had often transferred that distrust to left-wingers in the INC who had stood for the active anti-imperialist movement. Experience of many years of onerous and stubborn struggle, however, testified to the fact that the INC was politically heterogeneous, that its movement rightwards was not an irreversible process and that the direct task of Communists was to support the widening influence of left Congressmen among the people, encouraging their shift to more resolute anti-imperialist actions. Left Congressmen on the whole rejected the new law prepared by the colonialists for India, envisaging perpetuation of colonial rule and named the "servile constitution" by the Indian patriots. They called for a Constituent Assembly, supported by the people. In 1934 a new party was set up—the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), which joined the INC and formed its left wing. Between 1934 and 1935 the fight for trade union unity of the working class achieved some serious success, and the peasant movement came alive. Mass worker and peasant organisations endeavoured to join the National Congress as its collective members and have a decisive effect on its policy. The INC right wing stood opposed to that. In such a situation the historic decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress opened up broad prospects for Indian Communists.

Prominent Indian Communist S.G. Sardesai showed in his work *Seventh Congress of the Comintern and India's Struggle for Democracy and Freedom* what enormous importance the Seventh Congress condemnation of dogmatism and sectarianism had for the communist movement of India. What was of exceptional importance for the Communist Party of India was the Seventh Congress's advocacy of an anti-imperialist front in the colonies and semi-colonies. Sardesai wrote that as a consequence of sectarian mistakes the Communist Party of India had isolated itself from the mass anti-imperialist upsurge in India at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s. There had also been a mistaken assessment of the role of the national bourgeoisie in the liberation movement, and it was reckoned that the INC national-bourgeois leadership had no intention of heading the national movement, but would decapitate it and betray it to imperialism. Of course, Sardesai explained, the bourgeoisie was not keen on revolutionary struggle. But there was a vitally important distinction between

the policy of the bourgeoisie striving to take control of the mass anti-imperialist movement and a reactionary pro-imperialist policy. The conflict between the national bourgeoisie and imperialism really did exist. The bourgeoisie was interested in Indian independence. Indian Communists, wrote Sardesai, should have seen that the national-bourgeois leadership enjoyed enormous influence among the people; the INC was the most influential anti-imperialist mass organisation in the country and was attracting millions of fighters for freedom. At the same time, he noted, the communist and national movements in India in the late 1920s and early 1930s did not supplement, but rivalled one another. Sardesai stressed that the Seventh Comintern Congress was of great merit to the Indian communist movement; it firmly and resolutely oriented Indian Communists on the road that up till then they had only been groping for.<sup>1</sup>

On 11 February 1936 the Comintern Secretariat adopted a resolution "Proposals on the Indian Question", which was a further elaboration and concrete expression of the Seventh Congress decisions. It was preceded by a profound study of the socio-political situation in India and of the experience of the Communist Party of India.

The proposals set before Communists put forward the task of showing initiative and stepping up the struggle to establish a broad popular anti-imperialist front. This front, the document said, should be set up through the struggle against the colonialist-imposed "servile constitution", for India's independence, for the immediate implementation of urgent demands of the working people, so that the anti-imperialist popular front would be a front of action. Communists were recommended to join the INC, fight for the strengthening within it of the left wing, establish a united front with the Congress Socialist Party, support those of its proposals which met the people's vital interests. The resolution emphasised that that policy did not mean neglecting or weakening the ideological struggle and did not preclude a businesslike, specific criticism of reformism. In the opinion of the Secretariat, the main objective of Indian Communists was to get the INC to pursue a consistent struggle against British imperialism and do all to hamper any alliance between the INC and reactionary groups.

<sup>1</sup> See: S. G. Sardesai, *Seventh Congress of the Comintern and India's Struggle for Democracy and Freedom*, New Delhi, 1966.



Communists were recommended to advocate the calling of an All-India Constituent Assembly by universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot, to oppose it to the draft "servile constitution" and to explain that a genuine Constituent Assembly could only result from a broad popular movement.

The ECCI Secretariat, in drawing up this document of exceptional importance for the Communist Party of India, felt that the Party "had to be reshaped so as all its members could conduct daily persistent work in existing mass organisations and energetically take part in the popular struggle for the people's concrete needs and political rights". The Secretariat based itself on the notion that recognition of proletarian hegemony by a particular anti-imperialist contingent was certainly not a condition of "accepting" that contingent into the national anti-imperialist front; on the contrary, that recognition resulted from the persistent, dogged, consistent struggle of the Communist Party for the working people's everyday political and economic needs, for national liberation—a struggle being conducted within the framework of a united front. That conclusion fully accorded with Lenin's propositions on the national-colonial issue.

The Secretariat drew the attention of Indian Communists to the need for every possible combination of legal and illegal forms of struggle. It advised them to follow the example of the heroic struggle of the people of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) against Italian fascism and to "show the widest possible sections of the working people how they could and should fight and defend themselves".

The Comintern tried to focus the efforts of Indian Communists on the anti-imperialist struggle, on setting up and consolidating a united national front. The document "Proposals on the Indian Question" played an important part not only in strengthening the positions of the relatively small Communist Party of India, but also in promoting the mass liberation movement of the Indian people.

The major recommendations of the Comintern to Indian Communists found reflection also in the articles, written on its instructions, by the British Communists Ben Bradley and R. Palme Dutt in March 1936. They wrote, in part, "...there can be unity of the overwhelming majority of the population against imperialism, i.e., of all the popular masses who suffer under imperialist rule, and of all the elements from other classes who are prepared to join in the common struggle for national liberation". They went on to say: "The National

Congress has undoubtedly achieved a gigantic task in uniting wide forces of the Indian people for the national struggle, and remains today the principal existing mass organisation of many diverse elements seeking national liberation."<sup>1</sup> At the same time they indicated that the working class was destined to play the vanguard role in the anti-imperialist struggle.

After the political turn by the Comintern which was expressed in the decisions of its Seventh Congress, the leaders of the Communist Party of India began to strengthen contacts with leaders of the INC left wing. In particular, prominent Communist P. C. Joshi had talks with Nehru in February 1936. Nehru expressed his readiness to force right-wingers to leave the National Congress, and at the same time to ensure unity of the left and centre. He promised to back the proposal to unite trade unions, and also agreed to introduce union representatives into Congress leading agencies and to give them freedom to express their specific demands and views on a common Congress pre-election programme. It was assumed that left-wing elements of the Congress, including union representatives, would be included in the list of candidates drawn up by the Congress for the coming elections. What is more, Nehru promised to take up a favourable position in regard to the role and propaganda of Communists within the Congress. At the same time, Nehru had no wish to express his favourable attitude to Communists in an open and clear-cut form. On the whole he inclined towards a united front with Communists, but displayed circumspection.

The idea of cooperating with left Congressmen for the sake of establishing a broad anti-imperialist front was put forward primarily by Indian Communists themselves, who have come by the time through a substantial and difficult schooling of political struggle. The need for such a policy stemmed from life itself, the situation in India. At the same time, it was not difficult to see in the actions of the CPI leadership also a reflection of Comintern policy in regard to the liberation movement in the East, a policy that it had drawn up as a result of summarising the experience of the international communist movement, experience accumulated since the Second Comintern Congress. Two years later, representative of the Communist Party of the U.S.A. James Allen was to discuss with President of autonomous Philippines Manuel Quezon questions similar to those that Joshi and Nehru had

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, No. 11, 29 February 1936, pp. 297-98.



discussed in 1936, particularly that of a possible cooperation between Communists and progressives of the Nationalist Party.

Following Comintern recommendations, Indian Communists sharply stepped up their fight for the unity of the labour movement, for launching anti-imperialist and anti-feudal peasant actions, for consolidating the INC left wing, for getting mass associations of working people to join the National Congress and for converting it thereby into an organisation of a united national front, for the ideological and organisational strengthening of the Communist Party. The Comintern brought Lenin's behest to the Indian communist movement: "Indian Communists are duty-bound to support the bourgeois-democratic movement, but not to merge with it."<sup>1</sup>

Communists urged mass organisations to join the INC, especially the Kisan Sabha (peasant alliances) and the trade unions. This did not mean submitting them to national-bourgeois forces: the aim was to put left-wing pressure on the Congress leadership. It is hardly fortuitous that right-wing INC figures objected to those organisations joining the Congress. Simultaneously Communists fought to unite the national movement and to fortify the positions of the proletariat within the united front. The results of that policy were favourable both for the Communist Party of India and for the national liberation movement in which it was taking a most vigorous part. In 1936, the Communist Party and the Congress Socialist Party concluded an agreement on cooperation in the anti-imperialist struggle. Communists won the right to enter the CSP, while the CSP supported the communist idea of the mass organisations of workers and peasants entering the INC. At the end of 1936, some CSP members advocated the setting up of a joint party. The Communists felt it then feasible as a matter of principle, but, naturally, only on the basis of Marxism-Leninism. The merger did not take place: right-wing CSP leaders condemned the plans. But thousands of revolutionaries who had been members of the CSP then joined the Communist Party.

The mass organisations of working people more and more frequently were organising independent political actions. For example, workers organised successful strikes to win the liberation of political prisoners and revoke anti-worker legislation by Congress governments in various provinces. Communists,

after re-uniting the trade union movement, had acquired considerable influence in the All-India Trade Union Congress, and that enabled them to take an active part in drawing up the charter of workers' demands which expressed general national interests. It contained demands for a Constituent Assembly, complete independence, as well as anti-feudal slogans. The labour movement in India before the war was developing under the impact of the ever increasing influence of the Communist Party of India. Communists and revolutionary democrats who were orienting the Indian peasants on an anti-feudal revolution had obtained overwhelming influence by the late 1930s in the joint peasant organisation set up in 1936 and had squeezed out the reformists in some considerable measure. Communists sought to make the workers and peasants of India conscious of the community of their class interests. The united front policy had brought, therefore, two interconnected results: strengthening of the Communist Party of India, extension of its influence, and sharp intensification of the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle of the common people.

### 3. COMINTERN AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDOCHINA

After World War I the process of formation of a working class in Indochina and especially in its most developed part, Vietnam, was accelerated. The French firms in Indochina had over 200,000 workers by 1929. A local bourgeoisie had taken shape, but its development was being held back by French capital; the sphere of its activity remained mainly trade and small production. The local feudals were the prop for French colonialism.

The October Revolution in Russia stimulated the rise in the national liberation movement of the peoples of Indochina. Its ideas were taken up by revolutionary Vietnamese emigres in France who grouped around the young Vietnamese Marxist Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh). He had taken part in setting up the French Communist Party at its congress in Tours in 1920, had joined it and organised the illegal dispatch into Indochina of the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and documents and materials of the French Communist Party and the Comintern.

The General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Le Duan, writes: "The October

<sup>1</sup> *Vestnik 2-ogo Kongressa Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala*, No. 1, 27 July 1920.



Revolution marked a great turning point in the life of all humanity; it aroused wide sections of the working and oppressed peoples, raised them to fight for their class emancipation, national independence, freedom and human dignity, for being masters of their destiny. Those peoples included the people of Vietnam suffering from imperialist and feudal rule. It was at that moment when its struggle for saving the country had run into deep crisis and it was faced squarely with a choice of development, and when the situation in the country seemed pessimistic and intractable that we heard the thunderous rolls of the October Revolution."<sup>1</sup>

During the 1920s the national-revolutionary and national-reformist forces of Indochina had attempted to establish their own political organisations. The National Party of Vietnam, known also as the "Indochina Kuomintang", had been set up in January 1925 as a revolutionary petty-bourgeois organisation whose members were mainly representatives of the patriotic intelligentsia, small service personnel, students and some soldiers. The NPV resorted to collusion methods of struggle and met no support among wide sections of the working people. The national bourgeoisie, being feeble economically, also could not establish influential political organisations. In such circumstances the most consistent patriotic forces increasingly turned to communist ideas in the search for ways to liberate the country from imperialist and feudal tyranny.

Back in the autumn of 1924 the Executive had instructed Ho Chi Minh to arrange contacts between the Comintern and revolutionaries of Indochina. By that time Ho Chi Minh had considerable experience of international party work. He had been a delegate at the Fifth Comintern Congress in June and July 1924. As he mentioned in one of his letters to the Comintern, Lenin's theses on national and colonial questions presented to the Second Comintern Congress had made a big impression on the shaping of his philosophy.

The first thoughts and conclusions of the young Vietnamese revolutionary on the liberation movement in Indochina appeared in the Comintern Executive Committee back in 1923. Ho Chi Minh had noted that workers made up no more than 2 per cent of the population and had no organisation; the peasants were the most deprived part of the populace of the French colony in South East Asia; he described the intellectuals as

a revolutionary-nationalist force. One of the prime tasks of Communists of Indochina was, in his view, concerted action with revolutionary patriots. He tried to apply Lenin's thesis on uniting the revolutionary forces of the colonies, the workers of the metropolitan countries and the Land of the Soviets, "to establish contact between Moscow, Indochina and Paris". Later, in May 1924, Ho Chi Minh told the ECCI Eastern Section that he thought the national liberation movements of the East had little contact. It would be useful for the Vietnamese to know of the activity and life of their "Indian brothers" opposing British imperialism, to gain an idea of the movement of Japanese and Egyptian workers. Ho Chi Minh suggested to the Comintern to invite a group of young Vietnamese revolutionaries for studies. This suggestion was accepted.

In July 1923, Ho Chi Minh had written to the Comintern Executive Committee that decisions of the Second Comintern Congress on the national question had brought two results. On the one hand, the imperialists, foreseeing the dangerous consequences of the policy outlined at the Second Congress ("if it were to be put into effect seriously", Ho Chi Minh added) had redoubled their efforts in terms of repression and propaganda. On the other hand, he continued, "the oppressed peoples of the colonies, aroused by the echo of the revolution [in Russia—A. R.] were instinctively turning towards our International, the only political party which displays fraternal interest in them and on which they were putting all their hopes for liberation".

In the autumn of 1924, as Comintern plenipotentiary in organising revolutionary forces in Vietnam and in the whole of Indochina, Ho Chi Minh left for Canton, the location of the headquarters of the revolutionary Kuomintang. There were opportunities in Canton for propagandist and organisational work among Vietnamese emigre workers since it was the assembly point for Vietnamese revolutionaries who had fled from French colonialist persecution; Soviet Communists working as advisers to the Kuomintang, at its request, were also in the city.

Once he arrived in Canton in 1924, Ho Chi Minh began regularly to inform the Comintern on the situation in Indochina and on his own work. On 18 December he informed the Comintern of his first measures to organise a Vietnamese liberation movement. He had met several revolutionary Vietnamese emigres in Canton, about one of whom Ho Chi Minh had written in some detail. This particular emigre had several

<sup>1</sup> Le Duan, "Oktyabrskaya revolyutsiya i borba vietnamskogo naroda za natsionalnuyu nezavisimost i sotsializm", *Pravda*, 18 October 1977.



times returned to Indochina to organise an insurrection. But each time his attempts culminated in sporadic armed clashes between groups of patriots and French colonialists. "The sole aim of this man is to take vengeance on the enemy on behalf of his country," wrote Ho Chi Minh. And so he took upon himself the political education of this revolutionary. After several talks he became Ho Chi Minh's fellow-thinker and drew up a list of ten other supporters who were in the homeland. Ho Chi Minh decided to select five of them—one from each province of Indochina—and summon the five to Canton so as "to conduct political education with them for three months".

The now unknown Vietnamese revolutionary of whom Ho Chi Minh wrote to the Comintern from Canton took the path which was typical in the East for many freedom fighters. The direct impulse that excited them to revolutionary struggle was a passionate desire to do all they could to liberate their country from the foreign plunderers. Once they had gained an idea of Marxism-Leninism, they became convinced that they could achieve their objective only by taking part in the mass struggle of working people, and they turned to communist teaching in the belief that it could help them win both national and social emancipation. The young Communists of the East often pinned all their hopes of liberating their countries from colonialist tyranny and attaining political independence only on socialist revolution whose preparation they therefore considered the prime task. That was the situation also in Vietnam.

The services of Ho Chi Minh in training Marxist-Leninist fighters for his country were exceedingly great. Already in Canton he did a great deal in that respect. As many as 75 young Vietnamese became students at the propaganda school he had set up; he was responsible for the publication of small annuals in Vietnamese. The revolutionary propagandists who had received their training in Canton were then dispatched into Indochina.

Ho Chi Minh followed with very great attention the formation of a revolutionary wing of the patriotic movement in Indochina and encouraged the process. He thought it possible for some revolutionary nationalists to shift to communist positions and recommended the sending of some members of the "Indochina Kuomintang" to study at the Communist University of Working People of the East in Moscow.

Ho Chi Minh regularly informed the Comintern about the

revolutionary movement in Indochina. For example, he informed it of the underground organisation known as "Fight for Vietnam" actively operating in Tonkin; in fact, he quoted from a leaflet of the organisation, which said, "Tyranny is agonising. All peoples are responding to the signal given by revolutionary Russia. India and Egypt are stirring so as to win their freedom. Can the Vietnamese sleep peacefully? O People of Vietnam! If we do not succeed in freeing ourselves by regular methods, we shall not waver and we shall turn to violent means to avenge our homes and our country. O People of Vietnam! Awake!" Ho Chi Minh wrote also about the activity of the Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam which he had set up in Canton in 1925, among whom a communist group had been formed.

Study of the early stage of the communist movement in Indochina shows that it was crystallising out of the patriotic movement and was a result of the most consistent revolutionary patriots turning to Marxism-Leninism. This transition was taking place with the active assistance of the Comintern which operated in close contact with the great patriot and internationalist Ho Chi Minh.

The Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam in 1925 numbered some four thousand members, 70 per cent of whom were from petty-bourgeois classes, the remainder being workers and peasants. The Communist Party of Annam (CPA), which will be mentioned below, informed the Comintern in 1929 that from the moment of its founding the Youth League was under the considerable influence of communist ideology. It went on to say that the successes of revolution in Russia exerted a substantial effect on the League's members. The League established study organisations where members could study the "fundamentals of communism". It maintained contact with various national-revolutionary organisations then functioning in Vietnam. But the League did not have a concerted view of its objectives. Some considered that it should confine itself to preparing for national revolution and adhered to national-revolutionary positions; others steadily shifted to scientific socialism.

In February 1925 Ho Chi Minh organised in the ranks of the League a communist group consisting of nine members. Some of them were sent to Indochina. In 1927 the Vietnamese Communists operating in Canton within the League requested the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to enable them to set up a Vietnamese communist cell in



Canton. But the request was turned down. It was said that the Vietnamese should first complete a national revolution, that communist groups of Vietnamese were still weak and that Vietnamese would do better to join the Communist Party of China. Vietnamese Communists repeated their request several times more, but invariably got the same response.

Having established contact with the homeland, they created the first communist groups in Tonkin, Annam and Cochin-China (respectively the northern, central and southern part of Vietnam occupied by French imperialists). Communist members of the League worked hard to set up their organisations on the territory of Vietnam itself. Within the League Communists were gaining considerable influence. The Comintern and its French Section maintained contacts both with the League and with Communists operating and extending their positions within it. In March 1927 a meeting was held in Canton in which representatives of the Comintern, the French Communist Party and the League took part. The last-named was represented by Ho Chi Minh. It was planned to hold a conference of representatives of communist groups functioning in Vietnam itself in December 1927 in Canton. But the delegates from Vietnam arrived in the city right at the height of an uprising by the Canton proletariat. So the conference did not take place; many of the delegates ended up in Kuomintang prisons.

Thus, work to set up the Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam, in which the left wing was intensifying and a communist core was taking shape, preceded the formation of communist groups on the territory of Indochina. As communist organisations inside Vietnam became stronger, the importance of organisations functioning in South China declined.

In the summer of 1928 Ho Chi Minh left for Vietnam. His return home was of considerable importance for the fate of the Vietnamese communist movement.

A congress of the Revolutionary Youth League took place in the spring of 1929. A group of delegates to the congress from Tonkin suggested founding a communist party and disbanding the League. Other delegates disagreed with that proposal. Then the Tonkin delegates walked out of the congress and announced the organisation of the Indochina Communist Party (ICP). The remaining delegates declared their intention of establishing a communist party in the nearest future by carrying out the necessary preparations for that. In a special decision the congress "recognised as correct the Comintern

theory on the question of the colonies" and resolved to convene a "national congress of Communists".

After the setting up of the Indochina Communist Party the Party's members carried out a great deal of propaganda work in Tonkin. Those congress delegates of the League who had not agreed with the Tonkin idea to organise a communist party straightaway confined themselves at that moment to the setting up of an illegal Preparatory Committee for Organising a Communist Party. That Committee then formed a group that took the name the Communist Party of Annam. By the end of 1929 the CPA had 16 cells: 8 in industrial plants, 4 in the villages and 4 in colleges. Altogether it numbered some 60 members and 40 candidate members. It had comparatively more workers and peasants than the League. The CPA established contact with the large Saigon trade union centre, with the peasant organisation, as well as with one of the student unions. As for the Indochina Communist Party it had 55 members and over 30 candidate members by the end of 1929. The cells of that group were concentrated mainly in Hanoi and Hai Fong and rested on the proletarian base of Tonkin. One more group was functioning in Annam and Cochin-China—the Union of Communists of Indochina.

Thus, the most important problem of the revolutionary movement of Vietnam was to merge the communist groups.

The Comintern rendered its aid to the incipient communist movement in Indochina through the good offices of Ho Chi Minh. The decisions of the Comintern relating to the activity of Communists and the liberation struggle of the Vietnamese people were drafted with his participation and sent to him first of all. Back in May 1927 the ECCI Eastern Secretariat had prepared the first recommendations to Communists of Indochina. It advised them to unite the different communist groups into a single party. It drew the particular attention of Vietnamese Communists to work among proletarians and recommended Vietnamese Communists to set up a single directing centre on the territory of Indochina. In regard to tactics, the Executive Committee was convinced that the leadership's task was by no means to isolate Communists from the national movement, but to promote work within the national-revolutionary organisations so as to orient the latter on taking more decisive action. It came to the conclusion that the principal slogans of the national-revolutionary movement in Indochina would have to be independence of the country, the withdrawal of occupation forces, the calling of



a Constituent Assembly and the establishment of a revolutionary-democratic republic which would ensure the transfer of land to the peasants without compensation, extensive legislative guarantees of workers' rights and the defence of Vietnam from imperialist encroachments. It particularly underlined the need to maintain and safeguard the independence of the communist movement. The Comintern warned against communist groups turning into a left wing of national-revolutionary organisations.

The Comintern constantly drew the attention of the Communists of Indochina to the necessity of overcoming their lack of unity; it stressed the need to set up not a narrow group of "ideal Communists", but a mass party of the working class. "The best antidote" to clannishness was for workers to predominate in the leading bodies of the party. The Comintern attentively and sympathetically followed the first steps of the communist movement of Indochina which, by the end of 1929, had already acquired considerable organisation.

It was then, in October 1929, that the ECCI Eastern Secretariat discussed the question of the communist movement in Indochina. The meeting examined the Minimum Programme—a document drawn up by the Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam and sent to the Comintern. The document described the revolution facing Vietnam as being bourgeois-democratic, on the grounds that the bourgeoisie would not play a leading role in it. What is more, revolutionaries of Indochina were sure that the local bourgeoisie was colluding with imperialism. In that connection the League's congress, reflecting the viewpoint of the communist group, had put forward the slogan of "dictatorship of the proletariat, peasantry and soldiers" in their Minimum Programme.

As with the organisers of the communist nucleus in the Philippine Labour Party set up in 1925, the Vietnamese revolutionaries, having shifted to Marxist-Leninist positions, gave prime importance to combining a national liberation revolution and an agrarian revolution. They wrote about the desire of the working class to take leading positions in the national liberation and agrarian movement. Vietnamese revolutionaries understood the importance of work among the people and considered that members of communist groups were duty bound to enter reformist nationalist organisations so as to win over the masses and expose the opportunism of the leaders of such organisations.

After a careful study of the material of the Revolutionary

Youth League of Vietnam and information on the state of affairs within the communist groups of Indochina, the Comintern Executive in November 1929 set the Communists of Indochina the task of setting up a communist party by uniting the communist groups on a Marxist-Leninist basis. That unification was particularly urgent in view of an upsurge of a broad revolutionary movement in Indochina at the time. The Comintern came to the following conclusions: important revolutionary events could break out in Indochina in the near future; a mass movement of workers and peasants would grow, while there was not yet a united communist party; that would endanger the future revolution. Therefore, it was the urgent task of Communists in Indochina to set up a class revolutionary party of the proletariat, i.e., a mass Communist Party of Indochina; they needed immediately to create a unifying committee from representatives of all organisations recognising the programme and constitution of the Comintern and conducting active work among the workers and peasants. The unifying committee would perform the functions of a provisional Party Central Committee. The bulk of places within it should belong to workers and peasants.

The Comintern rendered considerable help to the Communists of Indochina in establishing a communist party.

On 3 February 1930, Ho Chi Minh, as representative of the Communist International, summoned delegates from the various communist groups to unite the latter into a single party. The setting up of a single communist party was a great event in the life of the Vietnamese people. Le Duan noted, "President Ho, who personified the essence of our nation, was the first Vietnamese to combine patriotism and socialism. He had said: 'In order to save the country and liberate the nation, there is no other way except proletarian revolution ... only socialism and communism can free the oppressed peoples and workers of the world from servitude.' Deeply steeped in that great idea, the Party of the Working People of Vietnam—the Communist Party of Indochina—has always held high the banner of national independence and socialism right from its founding in 1930."<sup>1</sup>

The Comintern emphasised the outstanding services of Ho Chi Minh as founder of the Communist Party of Indochina.

Soon after the founding of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh wrote the first programme documents of the

<sup>1</sup> *Nhan Dan*, 3 July 1976.



Party. He called it a party of the working class and wrote that it would bring the proletariat to head revolution in the interests of all exploited and oppressed people. He put forward the following demands: to destroy French imperialism, feudalism and the counter-revolutionary Vietnamese bourgeoisie; complete independence of Indochina; a worker-peasant and soldier government; confiscation of the banks; confiscation of all the plantations of the imperialists and the counter-revolutionary Vietnamese bourgeoisie for the purpose of their partition among the poor peasants; an eight-hour day; the freeing of the poor from taxes. This short draft programme encapsulated the sum total of party tasks at various stages of the revolution.

The *Short History of the Party of the Working People of Vietnam* stresses that the general line of the Vietnamese revolution worked out by Ho Chi Minh lay in carrying out a bourgeois-democratic revolution, including an agrarian revolution, overthrowing the French imperialists and feudal officials, making Vietnam a fully independent country heading for socialism.

The putting forward of the idea of a worker-peasant and soldier government, when the Party was being formed, was an appeal to the masses, an attempt to break through to them, to gain their support; true, many young Communists did not yet know *how* exactly that break-through was to be achieved, *how* that support was to be won.

The emergence of the first party documents was a big step forward in the development of the revolutionary and communist movement in Vietnam, a country where the communist party had arisen as a result of Marxist-Leninist ideas being adopted by the left revolutionary contingent of the patriotic movement linked to the struggle of the working class.

In October 1930 the First Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam decided to rename it the Communist Party of Indochina. It adopted Political Theses (whose author was its first General Secretary and outstanding revolutionary Chang Fu). The Theses indicated that after the October Revolution the Vietnamese revolution had become an integral part of the world proletarian revolution. It should undergo two stages: that of the bourgeois-democratic revolution under the guidance of the working class and directed against imperialism and feudalism, and that of transition to socialism, bypassing the capitalist stage.

For a party which had only just come into existence, the Communist Party of Vietnam was a fairly strong organisation. As a result of unifying the Indochina Communist Party

and the Communist Party of Annam the number of members of the new Party was 500 and the number of cells 40. Half of them worked at mills and factories. Trade union, peasant and student associations under party influence had a membership of 3,000 people. In 1930 the Party was joined by yet another organisation adhering to communist principles.

In May 1930 the Comintern Executive Committee drew the attention of the CPV leadership to the danger of a terrorist deviation in the Party. It noted that many members of the young CPV did not clearly enough understand its ultimate goal (communism was imagined as complete equality of rich and poor after the revolution). It recommended the Party to attract into its ranks industrial workers through dogged and planned work, to ensure that the Party gained a proletarian majority. The Comintern saw in the young Vietnamese Communists people sincerely striving to master and equip themselves with a scientific ideology, and it did much to help them.

Meanwhile in Vietnam, as the Comintern had foreseen, 1930 was a year of fierce battles for national independence and of class action. We may recall that in February in Yen Bay (northern Vietnam) an uprising had flared up led by the National Party of Vietnam. The Yen Bay uprising was not supported by the mass of the populace and was put down. In the summer of 1930 peasants set up councils (Soviets) in two provinces, confiscated landowners' lands and divided them up among themselves. Communists took an active part in the peasant movement. The councils lasted only three months. After the defeat of the Soviet movement the colonialists could, nonetheless, not force the peasants to be cowed. For example, in the spring and summer of 1931 several peasant demonstrations took place in Annam. About a thousand peasants took part in one of them; they demonstrated under red banners and two of their number were killed in clashes with the police. One person was killed in another demonstration, this time involving 200 people, three more in a demonstration involving 500 people, and nine people were killed in a fourth demonstration involving 200 protesters. On 14 April a demonstration took place in Ha Tin under anti-imperialist slogans in which 3,000 people took part. Police fired on the demonstration and 80 people were killed. In the same place on 1 May as many as 170 people were killed in clashes with the police.

New forms of struggle came into being in the situation of revolutionary upsurge. For example, in many provinces of



Vietnam many country people—sometimes close to a thousand—went from plantation to plantation, cutting telephone wires as they went, killing police and military patrols, confiscating rice stores from colonialists and landowners; local residents joined these peasants and they would all move on together.

The French authorities dealt severely with participants in the mass revolutionary movement. The colonialists set themselves the goal of physically destroying the Communist Party, and Indochina was flooded with troops and police. Hired provocateurs were infiltrated into the ranks of the fighters and, as a result of denunciations, thousands of Communists went to their death. Many were executed and others languished in prison; dozens of villages were burned down and hundreds of demonstrators were shot. Indochina was turned into a veritable bloodbath.

The Far Eastern Bureau of the ECCI Eastern Secretariat drew the attention of Indochina Communists to the need for a careful study of the balance of class and political forces in Indochina. It considered then that the national bourgeoisie had become an ally of the landowners and feudal aristocracy, and saw in the national-reformists the most dangerous foes of the workers and peasants. It recommended also the slogan of councils (Soviets), which was perfectly understandable: as experience had shown, the idea of the councils was close to Vietnamese peasants. Many recommendations of the Bureau were realistic. They included primarily setting up a strong and united party centre (at that time there was still no solid contact between the party organisations of Cochin-China, Annam and Tonkin). The Comintern Executive, the Eastern Secretariat and its Far Eastern Bureau thought it possible and necessary to launch a partisan movement in the more inaccessible areas of the country as a form of preparation, organisation and accumulation of armed forces for revolution. The Comintern and the French Communist Party arranged for the translation and publication in Vietnamese of Marx's and Engels's *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, the Comintern Programme, the theses on the national-colonial question adopted at the Second and Sixth Comintern congresses, the works of Lenin *The State and Revolution*, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, and *"Left-Wing" Communist—an Infantile Disorder*. The young Party, which had become a Comintern section in April 1931, was in great need of these works and materials. Comintern advice in regard to tactics was of considerable importance. The Eastern Secretariat and the Far Eastern Bureau

drew the attention of the Communist Party of Indochina to the danger of right-wing deviation as much as of terrorism and putschism; they condemned individual terror which was seen as an alternative to mass action. They warned the Communists against the provocative actions of Trotskyites.

In May 1932 the Comintern stated that the Communist Party of Indochina had become a militant party of the proletariat; after the defeat of the Yen Bay uprising, only the Communist Party could be the sole leader of revolutionary struggle against imperialism. The situation that had taken shape in the country enabled the Party to put forward such slogans as complete independence of Indochina, a worker-peasant government, confiscation of all lands of Indochinese landowners and French plantation-owners, an alliance with the international proletariat and the revolutionary movement in the colonies.

As far as forms of struggle were concerned, according to the Comintern, further development of the revolution necessitated the launching of a partisan movement; for the time being self-defence detachments at factories and in the countryside should be given more attention; full-time partisan detachments ought to be set up exclusively where the military-political and geographical conditions were favourable.

By 1932 the Communist Party already had a programme of principal revolutionary tasks: complete economic and political independence of Indochina; the overthrow of "native dynasties"; a revolutionary worker-peasant government; nationalisation of the banks, railways, industrial enterprises, irrigation systems belonging mainly to French capitalists; confiscation of lands and all the property of imperialists, landowners and usurers without compensation, with the subsequent partitioning of lands between farm labourers and poor peasants; the revoking of all shackling obligations imposed on working people by usurers and banks; a fraternal alliance of all working people of Indochina, the right to self-determination of the Cambodian and Laotian nationalities of Indochina; the eight-hour day. The advocating of a worker-peasant government as a specific task at that stage of the struggle by the Vietnamese people may be put down, in particular, to the fact that the bourgeois national party had disappeared from the political scene. Events had shown that there was opportunity of establishing a government of councils (Soviets) at least in individual districts of Vietnam. They also advanced specific demands in the interests of workers, working women, coolies, peasants, soldiers,



sailors, small merchants, artisans, office workers and the urban poor.

In analysing the Party's programme of action, the Comintern Executive concluded that consistent implementation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution was the direct objective of Communists in Indochina. Its victory would mean the establishment of a democratic dictatorship of the working class and peasantry.

We may note that there were in Indochina particular factors encouraging the emergence of "left" tendencies in the Communist Party (although it had a right "legal" deviation as well). One such factor was the viciousness of the French colonialists in putting down the popular movement. In such circumstances Vietnamese Communists were fighting for their lives and often found themselves in dire straits. Many of them believed that there was nothing for it but to take extreme action. The Comintern Executive, the Eastern Secretariat and its Far Eastern Bureau endeavoured, however, by painstaking argument to show the young revolutionaries of Indochina the disastrous consequences for the Party of "the tactics of despair". The pride of place in their explanatory work was taken up by the propaganda of Lenin's works, which showed the sources of "left-wing communism" and its baneful effects.

Up to 1934 the Communist Party of Indochina generally pursued a policy of rallying forces, consolidating ranks, fortifying local organisations and relations between them. Their experience of struggle and the advice of the Comintern increasingly brought its leaders to the conclusion that they needed a policy of a united front to make use of the anti-imperialist potential of national-bourgeois groups.

The Party's fight in those years cannot be seen in isolation from the events of enormous importance which were going on in Europe, from the realistic changes in Comintern policy, and also on that of the French Communist Party. In evaluating the factors that compelled the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Indochina to revise later some of its propositions, we must bear in mind at least three major circumstances: first, the political experience of the Party itself; second, the activity of the French Communist Party which from early 1934 had campaigned for a united anti-fascist, and then also a Popular Front; that policy culminated in the coming to power in France of a government supported by the Popular Front, which led to a considerable mitigation

of the colonial regime; and, finally, (last, but by no means least) a new strategy adopted by the Comintern in the mid-1930s in view of the real and mounting threat of fascism.

Communists of Vietnam were working among industrial workers and peasants, but they achieved their biggest success in the peasant milieu. That was understandable. The peasant movement against colonialists and feudals was on the upsurge in Indochina. Therefore, communist propaganda had most success in the countryside.

At first the Communists in China, Indonesia, the Philippines and Indochina concentrated their efforts on work among the urban proletariat. However, there was much that hampered their activity, above all the vicious control of the colonialists in the urban centres (in China, up to the Japanese invasion, that control was effected by the Kuomintang). After all, the agrarian districts could not be controlled so effectively; the authorities often did not possess sufficient military forces to carry out punitive operations there. The inhumanly exploited peasants were increasingly rising up to fight against the colonialists and the feudals. In such a situation Communists found more favourable conditions for their work in villages than in towns. As a result, the centre of gravity of party work somehow spontaneously shifted from the town to the countryside. The Communist Party of Indochina did not then have enough personnel to continue active work in the cities. Thus, the growing activity of Communists in agrarian districts was largely due to the force of circumstances.

Comintern documents of the early 1930s contained valuable theoretical conclusions taking into account the specific nature of colonial-agrarian problems, oriented the Communist Party of Indochina on work among the people, encouraged the ideological-political and organisational strengthening of the Communist Party. At that time the Comintern believed that a government of councils (Soviets) was a paramount and most effective slogan for the colonies; we may recall that not for all countries the slogan meant forestalling events. For example, Vietnam had in some areas for a few months peasant councils that took upon themselves the functions of government. Similar circumstances were forming in many districts of China. Only experience could show for which precise countries in the East this slogan was most advisable and effective. The fact that subsequently it was removed both for China and for Indochina by no means signifies that at the time it had been advanced it was not correct and realistic. First, the slogan



of establishing council government reflected the prevailing situation—the councils had already mainly arisen as a result of popular activity; second, in a historical sense the slogan was a form of bridge across to the united front of various anti-imperialist forces.

At the end of 1934, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Indochina began to prepare for the First Party Congress; the Party's Foreign Bureau, set up at the time, took part in this work. The Comintern insistently recommended that the Party Central Committee, being in Indochina itself, should take charge of the political work in the country. In regard to the Foreign Bureau, its functions were important, but limited: it ensured contact between the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Indochina and the Comintern and published the Party's theoretical periodical.

Back in mid-1934 a meeting of delegates of several big party organisations had taken place together with the Foreign Bureau. It noted the intensification of the worker, peasant and student movement, but considerably overestimated its immediate prospects. Participants in the meeting denied the existence of any progressive potential in the bourgeoisie. The meeting's Political Resolution contained important realistic points. It noted that many party members did not yet appreciate the fact that the revolution in Indochina was bourgeois-democratic, and, at the same time, underestimated the role of the workers, assuming that the peasants were the principal moving force of the revolution. The meeting thought the greatest danger was right-wing opportunism, but it also concluded that the Party needed to campaign also against the left deviation. That reflected the influence of the Comintern Executive whose representatives had worked with party delegates in the Foreign Bureau.

During preparations for the Seventh Comintern Congress the Eastern Secretariat had concluded that the prime objective of the Communist Party of Indochina was to organise a united anti-imperialist front of all working people irrespective of their party affiliation, and that in regard to national-revolutionary parties the Communist Party could no longer limit itself to exposing their inconsistencies. The Eastern Secretariat believed that Communists should also involve the parties of the petty bourgeoisie in the united front, while, of course, retaining their own ideological and organisational independence. At the same time, however, the Secretariat noted: workers should not "lose" their leading role in the front (although in fact that

role did not yet belong to them). Again and again the Secretariat drew the attention of Indochinese Communists to the idea that their main efforts should be oriented on uniting the workers. "The factory must become the fortress of the Party—they never tire to repeat that slogan, but up to now do not put it into effect. They must put their main efforts into the factories, mills and plantations."

The First Congress of the Communist Party of Indochina took place just before the Seventh Comintern Congress—in March 1935. An analysis of the revolutionary movement in Indochina in 1930 occupied an important place in the resolution. The CPI Congress noted that after the defeat of the Yen Bay uprising the revolutionary movement in Indochina had largely taken place under Communist Party leadership; at the same time it came to the conclusion that part of the bourgeoisie of Indochina still maintained anti-imperialist sentiments. Serious attention was paid to the social composition of the Party. The Congress noted that peasants made up the bulk of party membership, while a genuinely Marxist-Leninist party policy could only be ensured with a stable proletarian core. The resolution on detachments of revolutionary worker-peasant defence was an important document of the CPI Congress, which had worked in contact with the Comintern Executive. The Congress did not adopt the Chinese tactics of "liberated areas" which, at that time, would have been doomed to failure in Indochina.

Meanwhile an analysis of congress decisions on an anti-imperialist front shows that the Party leadership had not fully appreciated the complexity of that task.

The congress documents reflected the transitional state of the Party and were adopted at a time when it had made a turn to the policy of a united front. Many of the congress conclusions were made the basis for party policy in the latter part of the 1930s, when the Party directed all its efforts at setting up and uniting a common anti-fascist and anti-imperialist front. Comintern members took part in preparing the congress documents. Later a delegate from the Communist Party of Indochina to the Seventh Comintern Congress noted that a united front was an urgent problem for the Party, yet the CPI Congress had nonetheless regarded it as being secondary.

The French Communist Party exerted considerable beneficial influence on the development of the communist movement in Indochina. Many issues relating to the activity of the Communist Party of Indochina were discussed in the Comintern



with the participation of FCP members. The FCP carried on that activity in accord with Lenin's idea that metropolitan parties were duty bound to render every possible support to promote the communist and national liberation movement in the colony.

In early 1934, Indochina had a visit from a delegation of workers' organisations representing the French General Confederation of Labour and the International Workers' Relief. The delegation also included members of the French Communist Party, among whom was the outstanding French Communist Gabriel Péri. The Communists in the delegation acquainted themselves most carefully with the activity of the Communist Party of Indochina. They came to the conclusion that, as a result of terror unleashed by the colonial authorities, the Party had suffered enormously. When the delegation visited the colony there were no less than ten thousand revolutionaries in prisons or concentration camps of Indochina. The French Communists recommended to the Communists of Indochina a concrete programme of action: demand for an amnesty for political prisoners, the extension of French labour legislation to Indochina, the granting of civil and political rights to the population. In the first half of the 1930s the CPI committed certain mistakes of a left-wing nature, which were overcome in the course of subsequent struggle. But the major cause of the dire situation in which the Party found itself in the mid-1930s was colonialist terror. The French Communists noted this during their visit. The colonial authorities did not confine themselves to vicious repression—the shooting down of demonstrators, barbaric sentences, the aerial bombing of insurrectionist villages, arrests and executions of communist activists. From 1933 onwards they had organised the so-called “repentance campaign” in provinces where the revolutionary movement was particularly strong. They distributed many thousands of copies of “repentance cards” with a pre-written text which contained repentance statements and a promise to obey the authorities. Any Vietnamese receiving such a “card” had to put his signature to it, or, if he was illiterate, his finger-print. The colonialists also organised “solemn assemblies” in administrative centres at which commanders of punitive brigades made menacing speeches. The local populace was driven to such “assemblies” by force. Often the colonialists also resorted to the “preventative terror” method—the police would descend on a village with an already prepared list of Communists and non-party patriots. The lists were compiled

by the local authorities. People were put in dungeons or shot. That was how the colonialists dealt with the leaders of the revolutionary movement, while the local landowners dealt with peasant activists.

As mentioned already, the victory of the Popular Front at the polls in France in 1936 and the formation of a government enjoying communist support led to a certain mitigation of the colonial regime in Indochina. In June 1936 the Minister for the Colonies issued an order on the freeing of political prisoners. Between 1936 and 1937 several thousand prisoners, including many members of the Communist Party of Indochina were released; and the Party gained access to means of legal propaganda.

The Party Plenum meeting in May 1936, in line with decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress, set its aim as fighting for a united front of all progressive, antifascist forces in the country. In July 1936 the Party leadership sent local party organisations directives explaining the new Comintern line. It also sent a letter to other groups and parties proposing they come together in a united front, and put forward specific demands to the colonial authorities. The Party advocated the calling of an Indochina congress which should represent all sections of the population and convey their demands to the French Government. On Party initiative hundreds of “action committees” concerned with preparing for the congress were created.

In August 1936 a meeting took place in Saigon in support of the Indochina congress. About a thousand people representing the most diverse sections of the population took part in the meeting. For preparations a bureau of 18 people (of whom three represented workers and three peasants) was elected. Analogous assemblies took place in many cities of Vietnam, with their participants advancing mainly democratic demands of a general national nature: equality of rights and duties for the French and local residents, universal suffrage, freedom of speech and the press, movement and assembly, free education and an increase in the number of schools, lower taxes, and the outlawing of usury. Specific workers' demands were also put forward: the eight-hour day, equal payment for equal work for men and women, child labour protection. The demand to free all political prisoners was also popular. Representatives of national-bourgeois parties and organisations joined the congress organising committee set up as a result of that movement.

From the outset the movement for an Indochina congress



ran into bitter opposition from the colonial administration. Provincial prefects sent out special circulars declaring the distribution of leaflets calling for an Indochina congress a criminal offence. The Trotskyites, who had campaigned against unity, maintaining that the national bourgeoisie ought not to be involved in a united front movement since it was an agent of imperialism in Indochina, assisted thereby the colonial authorities. It was not long before representatives of the national bourgeoisie left the congress organising committee. Taking advantage of the split, the colonial administration stepped up repression against those taking part in the movement for an Indochina congress.

In March 1937 the Communist Party of Indochina advocated the setting up of a Democratic Front under the slogans "For Peace, Rice and Clothing!", "Against Fascism and War!", "Against Colonial Reaction!", "For Democratic Freedoms and Better Life for the People!" French Communists rendered great help in the movement for organising a Democratic Front; they sent their representative to Indochina. A group of Communists from Northern Vietnam, petty-bourgeois reformist groups and an association of French Socialists living in Indochina all joined the Democratic Front. It considered the antifascist struggle its principal task, pointed to the danger of Japanese aggression and supported the liberation war of the Chinese people.

Members of the Trotskyite group *La Lutte* caused grave harm to the antifascist movement. In full accord with the splitting tactics of Trotsky, his followers in Vietnam denied the importance of the antifascist struggle and the Popular Front, trying to counterpose the worker-peasant movement to other antifascist forces. The Trotskyites were up in arms against the Communist Party also because it had temporarily withdrawn (back in 1936) the slogan of fighting for immediate secession from France, regarding its prime task the uniting of all democratic forces in the face of the threat of fascism. In early 1937 Maurice Thorez spoke at the French Communist Party Congress saying that every nation had the right to independence, stressing at the same time that the "right to secession did not mean the obligation to secede". Communists of Vietnam took the same line and rebutted the Trotskyites.

In the face of the mounting threat of Japanese aggression the fight to unite all patriotic forces was set in the centre of Democratic Front activity. On 1 May 1938 the Front organised a demonstration of working people in Hanoi and Saigon under antifascist slogans. The results of the struggle of Communists

of Indochina for anti-imperialist unity were to tell fully during World War II.

#### 4. COMINTERN AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE PHILIPPINES

The Communist Party of the Philippines,<sup>1</sup> founded on 7 November 1930, possessed important traits that were not inherent in all communist parties of the East: it had a leading proletarian core and traditional relations with workers organisations. On the whole it followed the same path as the others, and acted in a similar situation. There was the same intertwining of class and national objectives, the same need for struggle against both colonialism and precapitalist forms of exploitation, the same conditions of police repression or its threat, the same overcoming of sectarian mistakes, the same alternation of success and defeat, the same selfless devotion and heroism in fierce clashes with the powers-that-be, and the same difficulties in spreading Marxist-Leninist ideas.

The Comintern gave considerable assistance to the Communists of the Philippines in setting up their Party and equipping it with fundamental theoretical, programme, tactical and organisational principles of Marxism-Leninism. Of course, it did not set and could not set itself the task of organising a communist movement in the Philippines. The emergence of that movement in a particular country was a natural result of the growth in organisation and political awareness of its working people headed by the proletariat, the development and interaction of social and political forces.

The labour movement in the Philippines was relatively strong and well organised. The workers took an active part in the national liberation struggle. By the 1930s the country had for over fifteen years possessed a strong trade union association—the Philippine Labour Congress, whose most politically-conscious leaders increasingly freed themselves from the influence of the bourgeois Nationalist Party, which hoped to gain autonomy and then independence for the Philippines through reforms. The Labour Congress had as its member the National Confederation of Farm Tenants and Labourers of the Philippines which, in the mid-1920s, had some 25,000 members.

<sup>1</sup> Until October 1938 it was called the Communist Party of the Philippine Islands.



At the end of 1924 the Labour Party came into being, the forerunner of the Communist Party of the Philippines, comprising mainly trade union activists. The establishment of the Labour Party was the result primarily of the selfless endeavour of advanced workers (and the intellectuals close to them)—Crisanto Evangelista, Antonio D. Ora and other revolutionaries who had turned to Marxism.

In May 1924 U.S. Communist Party representative Elliot arrived in Manila. The Comintern Eastern Section had instructed him to gather information on the state of the labour and national-revolutionary movement and to help local revolutionary workers set up a communist party. Elliot's main task was to organise a Philippine trade union delegation for the Conference of the Pacific (Oriental) Transport Workers (which was to be held in Canton in June 1924 and in whose preparations the Profintern had a big hand). Elliot made contact with leaders of the biggest unions and union centres in the Philippines, paying particular attention to the Labour Congress and the National Confederation of Farm Tenants and Labourers. He gave the Comintern a detailed report of the political situation and the state of the labour movement, as well as the prospects for organising a communist party. A group of Philippine workers, said Elliot, was taking up revolutionary positions and had need of communist guidance. The Comintern came to the conclusion that although Communists could and should occupy a leading position in the struggle for national liberation, displacing bourgeois nationalists, that task was not realisable until Communists united into a party. Such was the Comintern's stand at its Fifth Plenum which in April 1925 adopted its first decision on the Philippines.

It was a resolution recommending the U.S. Communists to support the liberation movement in countries oppressed by American imperialism. It noted that a revolutionary wing was active in the movement for independence in the Philippines, especially that part which represented the labouring sections of the populace. The Comintern did not exclude the possibility that even those participants of the national movement who did not represent the labouring people could also make their contribution to the liberation struggle (that view was fully in line with Lenin's conclusions). The situation in the country dictated the need to encourage the formation of a communist party from proletarians and revolutionary intellectuals, to help expand the trade union movement and to revolutionise the Labour Congress and the Federation of Labour of the Philippines

(another union centre), to conduct energetic work among peasant organisations, working out a specific programme of agrarian demands and, finally, to render assistance in forming a national-revolutionary party. The communist movement that had sprung up needed help, and the Comintern, in outlining the path of development for a communist party, indicating its realistic political objectives and in summing up its conclusions and advice in a resolution of the Fifth Plenum, gave the young movement that assistance.

The Comintern resolution pointed to the major directions of communist activity in the colony. The Comintern programme was subsequently carried out to a large extent. Advanced workers, making use of Comintern help, and advice from the Communist Party of the United States, succeeded in establishing a communist party which, both in composition and in programme, became a workers party; they succeeded in taking over the leadership of the biggest trade union centre in the country—the Philippine Labour Congress; and they managed to head the National Confederation of Farm Tenants and Labourers, uniting it on the basis of a programme of specific agrarian demands. However, the mass national-revolutionary party mentioned in the resolution did not come into existence. But thanks, in particular, to effective pressure which workers' organisations headed by Communists put on the nationalists in the latter half of the 1930s, the ruling bourgeois-reformist group in the Philippines made a marked swing to the left. Before World War II, working in tandem with the Communist Party that was small but influential among the people, it came into conflict with pro-Japanese cliques.

It is hard to follow the direct relationship between the trip of the U.S. Communist Party representative to the Philippines and the establishment of the Labour Party in 1924. What we do know, however, is that Communists, acting on Comintern instructions, took part in drawing up programme documents for that Party. The Labour Party Executive Council adopted a Manifesto in November 1925, as a form of constituent document. Alimin and Tan Malaka of the Communist Party of Indonesia (the latter being Comintern plenipotentiary in countries of East Asia) had a hand in drawing it up.

The Manifesto was prepared under the Comintern's ideological influence. The Labour Party, the Manifesto said, was fighting for socialist ideals. The Party advocated the immediate and complete independence of the Philippines, the confiscation of landowners' lands and their distribution among



poor peasants and leaseholders, and spoke for extensive democratic changes. Comintern influence on the Manifesto authors was expressed, in particular, in that the Labour Party organisers, at the dawn of its existence, at the time when the Marxist core was only just being formed, were approaching a vital strategic principle: they felt that the Party's task was to encourage the organisation of "every active social group from those campaigning for the country's independence" and "to unite them into a single front against the common foe-imperialism".

The Manifesto clearly stated the idea that the workers should do their utmost to see that all anti-imperialist and democratic forces come together in a united front, and fully develop their progressive capabilities within it. Quite naturally, the advanced workers combining in the Labour Party intended to lead the fight for independence and that intention found expression in the Manifesto. The Labour Party advanced the slogan: "Let us prepare the Philippine people for complete and absolute independence for all, and not for a tyrannical minority."

In 1927 U.S. Communist Harrison George, a Profintern representative, arrived in the Philippines. While there, he concluded that a communist party could be established out of the most experienced personnel of the Labour Party. Their leaders were Antonio D. Ora, the Labour Party Chairman, and Crisanto Evangelista, leader of the Printers Union, himself a printing worker, a leader of the Labour Party and prominent figure in the Philippine Labour Congress. That small group of Communists had a lot to do within the Labour Party, as well as in the Philippine Labour Congress (in 1927 the latter had some 70,000 members and 32 branch unions). The Philippine Labour Congress was becoming radicalised under the influence of advanced workers who were members of the Labour Party and was becoming a mass organisation. The National Confederation of Farm Tenants and Labourers (better known subsequently as the National Confederation of Farm Workers) was functioning and gathering strength. The Confederation joined the Labour Congress and worked under the leadership of Labour Party communist members.

The Communists in the Philippines worked to revolutionise the Labour Party and form within it a class-conscious group of workers who would be the core of a future communist party. They were supported in their effort by the Comintern Eastern Secretariat. It was a realistic prospect. The Labour Party

was then the only political organisation of the working class, and there were initially not many people who had moved to Marxist-Leninist positions. Thus, in orienting advanced workers on activity within the Labour Party (which had by early 1928 over 500 members), the Comintern strictly observed Lenin's principle of working "*wherever the masses are to be found*", since for the advanced communist-minded workers of the Philippines the 500-strong Labour Party constituted a not inconsiderable force.

The Comintern Executive came to this orientation gradually, through summing up the experience of struggle of the Philippine working people, and considering the opinion of Philippine and American Communists. The advice and recommendations were never foisted on Philippine Communists. In giving its advice, the Eastern Section (later the Eastern Secretariat) often noted that it had a preliminary and guiding character and should be carefully studied with account of the specific situation.

In April 1928, the Comintern Executive adopted a decision to recommend to Communists to focus attention on establishing a communist party. That should best be done, the Comintern Executive emphasised, by acting within the framework of the Labour Party. It oriented Communists on forming a Marxist-Leninist initiatory group which would study the experience of the world communist movement, would apply its conclusions to the particular conditions in the Philippines and be able gradually to turn the Labour Party into a mass party. The Comintern Executive felt that Communists in the Philippines were faced by a dual task in the formation of a party: as they established a communist party they would have to make it an increasingly mass party and, as the April resolution of the Comintern Executive put it, "increasingly communist". The very posing of that complex and difficult task contained elements for its resolution. The party would have to grow on the basis of a communist platform, by unswervingly observing Lenin's principle of retaining and safeguarding independence of the communist movement. The Comintern fully appreciated the danger of "a mere change of signboards", a simple dressing-up of not genuinely communist elements in communist garb.

The Comintern Executive thought it necessary that the incipient party should have in its platform both clearly formulated ultimate goals and transitional and partial demands. The transitional demands would include the confiscation of landowners' lands and their distribution among the peasants, higher living standards for the working class, and the national liberation



of the Philippines. A demand for setting up a popular government of workers and peasants, though advisable, was not however regarded as a precondition for implementing changes of a transitory nature. The ECCI recommended Philippine Communists to advance also direct demands, such as lower rent and tax, a shorter working day, higher wages and an end to national inequality. It recommended many communist parties in the East not only clearly to distinguish between maximum and minimum programmes, but also to formulate a programme of direct action which should include the most urgent, vital specific demands of the common people. It believed that the major tasks of the Communists in the Philippines were to organise a united trade union movement and further to strengthen their influence within the Labour Congress. All those recommendations were to be a subject of discussion for the Philippine Communists.

The list of demands which the Labour Party put forward at the time showed that the revolutionary workers—and precisely they determined its policy—proclaimed a socialist objective and recognised the importance of the democratic national liberation stage of revolution and transitional demands, seeing their direct task in mobilising the oppressed sections of the population for resolving urgent national problems. The proletarian leadership of the Labour Party included among such problems the immediate, complete and absolute independence of the Philippines, nationalisation of the land, banks and the principal means of transport, removal of peonage and other forms of personal dependence in agriculture, a revision of the system of taxation, encouragement of peasant cooperation, introduction of labour laws. Victory at the transitional stage meant driving out the foreign exploiters, giving the peasants land, freeing the people from the power of the landowners and venal officials. By formulating these demands the labour Party strengthened its position among the people. The interests of the peasants were very close to Labour Party leaders, who were usually ordinary working people. Communist members of the Labour Party sometimes even called it a worker-peasant party. But recognition of the democratic stage of the revolution and, correspondingly, of transitional demands was typical of only a small group of Labour Party leaders—largely the industrial workers who had turned to Marxism-Leninism in the search for ways to national independence, consistent democracy and emancipation of the working class. As a rule, the hatred that workers and other ordinary people in the Philippines had for their oppressors produced an urge

to put an end to national and social tyranny at a single crushing blow. In other words, one and the same factor—a desire to liberate their people—induced the most politically-conscious workers to recognise the step-by-step development of the revolution, and the mass of politically active working people to reject that way of development for lack of understanding. The people, naturally, had an effect on the worker leaders, and that was bound to have certain results: often, especially at times of intensified class battles, the Labour Party leaders considered the socialist goal close and directly attainable. One must also bear in mind that at that time the Labour Party leaders were only just becoming Communists, only just mastering the theoretical, programme and tactical fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism.

From the summer of 1928, Crisanto Evangelista put in a great deal of organisational work in setting up communist cells. He conducted propaganda among the printing, textile and leather workers, the builders and tobacco workers. He and his fellow-thinkers insistently and doggedly worked to get the Labour Congress to join the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat—the international revolutionary trade union association close to the Profintern. Evangelista and his comrades set up factory committees of workers, and among their members communist groups were formed.

When Evangelista returned back to the Philippines after the Fourth Profintern Congress had completed its work, the number of his associates doubled to 40 in the spring and summer of 1928. That was a considerable success.

Evangelista drew up the Basic Programme of his group—a kind of manifesto of the Philippine worker revolutionaries. It provided an idea of how Evangelista and his comrades arrived at communist ideas. He thought it necessary to make the workers class conscious, “to do so in order that the workers were not a mere tool of another class that had seized the monopoly of all the benefits which could be extracted from agriculture, industry, trade, wealth, government institutions, schools and freedom—a monopoly of all that was necessary for life”; “let the masses take all that under their government and enjoy all the benefits which could be extracted from it”; “we must mobilise and unite the workers and peasants and raise them to fight to achieve the political and economic independence of the country”. Evangelista had become a Communist also because he was a patriot, striving to see his country free.

Communists united in the Communist International knew



the way to liberation. It was the class struggle of workers uniting the nation under their firm and selfless leadership. The great problem of relationship of class and national goals of workers in an oppressed country had been posed and resolved theoretically by Lenin in 1920. But for Communists of the Eastern countries it was a problem that was predominantly practical and not yet resolved in practice in the next decade and even later. It had arisen again and again in the minds of workers—revolutionaries and patriots—who had given thought to the fate of their country and their class; the most advanced of them were able to tackle it correctly, in a spirit of cooperation and organic unity, rather than counterposing both facets of it—the fight for social and national liberation. But many long years of political experience and help from the Comintern were necessary before the approach became correct.

By the end of 1928, the National Confederation of Farm Workers, which by that time was headed by Communists, had become a militant class organisation closely allied to the Labour Party and the Labour Congress. It published its own newspaper *Son of Sweat*. In December 1928 it held its Third Convention which has gone down as the Philippine Peasant Congress. It confirmed the Platform of Action and Demands which contained urgent demands of the peasants and farm workers. The NCFW also advocated "immediate, complete and absolute independence for the Philippines". The Convention adopted several resolutions of an internationalist nature—in support of the Peasant International, the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat and the Anti-Imperialist League. Greetings were sent to the Soviet Union "on the successful construction of socialism which inspires workers and peasants all over the world".

The NCFW leadership maintained regular contacts with the Comintern and with leaders in the Communist Party of the USA, in particular with Eugene Dennis, informing them of the Confederation's activity and events in the country. Seeing in the Comintern the expression of the interests of working people the world over, the NCFW leaders informed the Comintern, for example, of incidents of peasants being driven from the land, of the confiscation of the harvest for the benefit of landowners and usurers, of peasant and worker demonstrations. Many thousands of people often took part in such actions.

In the situation of the growing labour movement, Communists in the Philippines—leaders of the Labour Congress and the National Confederation of Farm Workers, anticipating events,

decided that the time was ripe for them to take charge of the liberation movement. The "left-wing communism", characteristic of the Communists of the Philippines in the late 1920s, had its reasons. We have already mentioned the main one—the desire to put an end to national and social oppression at one blow. At the same time, considerable success achieved by Communists also encouraged the emergence of left-wing moods. After all, they had not yet become organised in a party, remaining merely a group of like-minded people; and they had a strong influence on the policy of mass worker and peasant organisations. That led to an over-optimistic assessment of their power and potential.

In early May 1929, a split occurred at the convention of the Philippine Labour Congress: 27 unions under the ideological and political influence of the Labour Party and accounting for about half the Congress members walked out of the Philippine Labour Congress and formed the so-called Labour Congress of the Philippine Proletariat, which later became known as the Proletarian Union. The NCFW became its collective member.

At that time the Comintern assessment and view of the communist movement in the Philippines underwent certain changes. In the autumn of 1929 those changes found expression in a special decision. The Comintern continued to hold that the fight for national independence was the principal objective of the liberation movement in the U.S. Pacific colony. As before, elimination of feudal vestiges was to be a task of prime importance. But now the Comintern Executive put forward a third objective—establishment of a worker-peasant revolutionary anti-imperialist government. Such a government, the Comintern believed, would be bound to encourage revolution's development to a new stage that was transitional towards socialism. Bearing in mind these major tasks of the revolutionary movement, the Comintern concluded that the process of forming a communist party lagged behind the militant movement of workers and peasants.

At that time Philippine Communists already regarded it their practical task to set up a communist party, a class-revolutionary party of the proletariat that would combine illegal and legal fighting methods. The party, noted the Comintern, was to undertake all measures so as to work legally. Not to lose the opportunity of conducting legal activity—that idea invariably dominated much of the advice of the Comintern to communist parties of the East. At the same time, while



achieving legality, the party should have a firm illegal core so as to be able effectively to reconstitute itself into an illegal organisation in the event of the ruling classes resorting to terrorist methods of combating the party. As further events were to show, that advice was to be extremely precious.

This set of tasks was aimed at bringing both workers and peasants to an understanding of the need for fighting the colonial regime. In other words, agrarian policy and the anti-imperialist course were seen in the closest relationship. The Comintern by no means confined itself to advancing a "purely anti-imperialist programme" unconnected with the tasks of class struggle in the country; the anti-imperialist policy indicated the main direction of the anti-colonialist offensive. Nonetheless, the Comintern considered that it was precisely the class slogans that would ensure mass support for the national liberation movement. That was a theoretically correct and practically useful proposition, combining a class and national liberation orientation and rooted in Lenin's teaching on the national-colonial question.

In the autumn of 1929, the Comintern felt it feasible for Philippine Communists practically to approach the question of split in the reformist trade unions and of establishment of parallel revolutionary union organisations (the split in the Labour Congress, we may recall, had taken place a few months earlier). Yet at the same time, the Comintern still advised Communists to show caution and only to start setting up parallel unions in the following circumstances: if the mass proletarian movement was on the rise; if the major bulk of the workers would follow the revolutionary trade unions; if the latter were to have a clearly formulated programme.

In regard to the strategic objective, the Comintern, at a time of fast-approaching world crisis, oriented Philippine Communists on the development of a bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution in the course of struggle for a non-capitalist path for the Philippines. It was certainly not a case of direct battle for power. It was merely suggested that the political pressure of the proletariat and the growing number of its supporters would accelerate the bourgeois-democratic stage of revolution. Non-capitalist development should, in the opinion of the Comintern Executive, precede the coming to power of the proletariat. At the same time, the proposition of a non-capitalist path of development (as applied also to China two years previously) was understood in a rather one-sided way; such development was believed to be possible on

the exclusive condition that both the political role of the working class and its leadership of the liberation movement grew swiftly. Clearly, however, in the autumn of 1929 the Comintern allowed for the possibility of the anti-imperialist worker-peasant government (i.e., *not yet* dictatorship of the proletariat) implementing changes of a socialist nature in the Philippines. Hence, the notion, widespread in bourgeois and reformist historiography, that the Comintern in the late 1920s was orienting Communists of the Philippines (and elsewhere) on a direct take-over of power is obviously erroneous.

The practical advice given by the Comintern to Communists of the Philippines in 1929 may be reduced ultimately to a recommendation that they should set up a communist party as soon as possible.

The establishment of the Communist Party of the Philippine Islands (CPPI) was announced by Evangelista and Ora at a mass meeting in Manila on 7 November 1930. It had been preceded by a Political Conference of delegates organised by Communists, and attended by representatives of trade unions and peasant organisations. The Conference adopted a decision to set up a party and approved its draft programme written by Evangelista with account for Comintern recommendations. CPPI activists got down to explaining the programme (a small number of copies had been printed on a hectograph). They stopped workers in the streets of Manila and organised small gatherings. So the CPPI commenced its life of struggle. At the end of 1930 it had no more than fifty registered members. At the time the country was experiencing strikes and spontaneous peasant insurrections under slogans of national liberation and fair distribution of land.

During the first six or seven years of its existence the CPPI committed more than a few leftist errors, including contempt for legal work methods, rejection of support for nationalists in their manoeuvred advance towards autonomy and independence, a desire to obtain immediately leading positions in the national movement, a negative attitude both to the relatively progressive and to the openly collaborationist groups of national-bourgeois circles. The result was a growing threat of the Party's isolation from the people; such a policy played into the hands of its enemies and the Party more than once suffered police raids.

As mentioned earlier, the reasons for leftist mistakes should be sought primarily in the nature of the CPPI itself, whose leaders yielded to the mounting pressure of the politically



active mass of working people who hoped to resolve all the tasks of the national and social revolution at one blow and rejected any compromise with national bourgeoisie. That was bound to tell on the Party leadership's policy. This is, for example, what Antonio Ora said in January 1931 in his last speech (two days before his tragic death—he was arrested by the authorities and died in a "car crash"): "Both the current leaders and the government (nationalists and democrats alike) are rogues and bandits. They rob and spend the people's money. With the red banner of Bonifacio,<sup>1</sup> we Communists must overthrow the present government and hoist high the red banner of Soviets."

This style is very typical of many Philippine Communists of the time. The oppressed worker who had recently awoken to politics was far from comprehending the historical laws of the democratic stage of revolution. One should also bear in mind that Marxist-Leninist ideas that penetrated the working people of an oppressed country, where Communists were only a small handful of people, did not exist in an ideological and political vacuum. They became intertwined with traditions by dint of which the customary subordination to the ruling classes knew only one alternative—a burning desire to put an end to all evil once and for all through a coup. Those ideas reached the East at the time in narrow gullies, and not in wide streams. As an example, the only Philippine Communist who had read the Comintern programme at the time the Party was formed was Evangelista. As experience shows (at least in regard to the East), a communist party that has just come into being and "shaken itself free" of reformism often veered to the left, even if its leaders essentially followed the correct line. It would be quite senseless to condemn such a party many years afterwards. The CPPI, like many other young communist parties in the East, was to learn from its mistakes while accumulating its own political experience and relying on Comintern assistance.

In the early 1930s the Comintern continued to follow CPPI activity attentively, rendering it all possible support. It set Philippine Communists the same task as before: to come to the forefront in the national struggle; it condemned both

<sup>1</sup> Andrés Bonifacio was leader of the poor in the Philippine national liberation movement of 1896-1898. He was the initiator and organiser of the armed uprising against the Spanish rule in August 1896. In 1897, bourgeois and landowning groups which had joined in the uprising falsely accused him of "conspiracy"; he was put in gaol and secretly murdered.

legalism and rejection of the use of legal methods of struggle and sectarian proposals to replace mass organised action by individual terrorist methods; it drew attention to implementing revolutionary agrarian changes as the basis of victorious struggle against imperialism. Meanwhile, the recommendations which during those years were sent to the CPPI reflected a typical notion of the Comintern at that time: the rule of colonialists could be brought down only by the working class leading the anti-colonialist movement. The slogan of councils of workers' and peasants' deputies was among the paramount political propositions. In advancing that slogan, the Comintern at the same time oriented Philippine Communists on an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution. It well appreciated that proletarian dictatorship would have been unjustified and unrealistic at the current stage of the revolutionary process. It believed that only a sharp rise, an explosion, an avalanche of popular movement could bring about councils as an immediate practical task.

Together with Philippine comrades the Comintern Executive continued intensively to work on ways for revolution in the Philippines, on prospects for the CPPI which, in the early 1930s, had actually become a section of the Communist International. This small workers' party was groping its way into the countryside where peasant discontent broke out periodically. Despite all its hatred for the national-reformists it did not proclaim the coming to power of Communists as a must for winning the country's political independence. The Party was headed by revolutionary workers. The situation was somewhat unusual.

Several years earlier the Comintern had unsistently and finally unsuccessfully oriented the Communist Party of Indonesia on work in the countryside. But the party leaders, despite Comintern advice, had followed a suicidal course of outright seizure of power. At the same time the Chinese party leadership had been losing its proletarian character.

Relatively favourable prospects were opening up in the Philippines, although the CPPI was far from consistently pursuing a policy of an alliance with the peasantry and a policy for gaining political independence prior to socialist revolution. The proletarian leadership of the Party was obviously having trouble resisting the pressure of ultra-revolutionary sentiment. Besides, partial setbacks were pushing Philippine Communists to sectarian positions. In that connection, one can understand the rapt attention which the Comintern displayed towards the communist movement in the U.S. Pacific colony. It had to



stimulate long-term directions of party work and stem ultra-left tendencies. Many prominent figures of the international communist movement directly helped the Communist Party of the Philippines at that time; they included Eugene Dennis, Otto Kuusinen, Wilhelm Pieck and D.Z. Manuilsky.

As noted at the Seventh Comintern Congress, in the early 1930s the ECCI had not provided a clear enough assessment of communist parties' tendency in the colonies and semi-colonies to reject any form of cooperation with national-reformists (in particular this referred to the intention of CPPI leaders to turn the greater part of its effort against national-reformists).

The Comintern Executive Committee criticised decisions of the First Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippine Islands of January 1932. It was critical of the Plenum's call for immediate organisation of councils (Soviets) in all urban and rural districts, explaining that they could arise only in a revolutionary situation, in the course of joint struggle of workers and peasants. The Party, however, had not yet established contact with the peasants. The Comintern also criticised the notion current in the Party of "rivalry" between workers and peasants; it pointed out that it would be wrong for Communists to ignore the peasant movement in a country where the key problem was an anti-imperialist agrarian revolution, and it called upon the Party to organise the proletariat in the struggle for everyday and urgent demands; it oriented the Party on strengthening the internationalist positions. Let us note in this connection that a separate Chinese Section in the CPPI existed despite Comintern's opinion against such an autonomy.

The authorities meanwhile were dealing blow after blow to the CPPI. That was the main, but not the only reason for the fall in membership (during 1933 the total membership diminished from 850 to 230).

There is a natural relationship between the party's tactical and strategic policy and its membership. At first the overt declaration of communist principles usually leads to party growth (mainly through the transfer to communist positions of resolute revolutionaries, particularly left-wing Socialists and anarcho-syndicalists in the West, and active members and leaders of workers' associations, peasant leaders and radical patriots in the East). Further changes in membership depend greatly on the party's tactics and strategy. Ultra-revolutionary posturing results in sectarianism precisely because a "straight line" to socialist

revolution is unrealistic, defeat follows defeat, and the party not only ceases to attract the ordinary people, but even loses their support. Party membership declines owing to repression from the propertied classes and also to its own mistaken policy. A turn to a united front policy, to practical activity in resolving tasks of the given stage of the revolution produces two results in a situation of an upsurge in the popular movement: a growth in the party and extension of its political influence, which is much more important than its numbers. The history of the Communist Party of the Philippines provides convincing confirmation of that.

In March 1933, the Second C.C. Party Plenum, whose preparations were helped by Eugene Dennis, undertook the first attempt to reorientate the Party policy, taking account of contradictions between the Philippine bourgeoisie and U.S. imperialism. Yet the Plenum still described "reformism" as the "major danger". The Second Party Congress in 1935 did not amend its strategy; for that to happen Philippine Communists had to go through years of struggle to acquire experience and knowledge. The strategic reorientation of the international revolutionary working-class movement also had considerable importance. But the activity of Philippine Communists in the first half of the 1930s could not be viewed as a series of sectarian mistakes. It was a series of practical and ideological battles of the Party against the oppressors. Experience of these battles was to come in useful later, when a united front policy became the Party's consistent objective.

The shift of the Communist Party of the Philippines to the united front policy could only take place in the latter half of the 1930s. Decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress were of paramount importance in that they signalled the reorientation of the entire international communist movement in the West and East towards a united front of all antifascist democratic forces. Also important were the Comintern decisions concerning specifically the communist movement in the Philippines.

In that connection we should bear in the mind the following. The change in policy by Philippine Communists took place through analysing their own political struggle and errors committed and using the experience of the international communist movement. The advice and recommendations of the Comintern were of great help. With all possible urgency they were transmitted to the leadership of the appropriate parties; often this was done through the *Inprecorr* publications



(International Press Correspondence). Much of the advice and instructions worked out on the basis of experience of the international communist movement and the party concerned was prepared with the active participation of the particular party's representatives. The Comintern viewpoint was elucidated to local Communists by experienced and authoritative officials of the Comintern Executive and the fraternal parties, well informed on the situation in the country concerned. Having received advice or recommendations from the Comintern, the party leadership carried out further work in improving the political line, sharpening up the party's theoretical, programme and tactical positions. That, in turn, was reflected in the activity of the organisations guided by the party. Comintern relations with communist parties should justly be called relations of cooperation. It was not simply a matter of the Comintern Executive taking account of the opinion of the leadership of the party concerned. Comintern documents, particularly those which related to Eastern countries when the communist movement was emerging, were received by people who had a certain mode of thought that had been shaped by specific conditions and not exclusively by the impact of Marxist-Leninist ideas. Even the most trained, politically-conscious and enlightened of them experienced the influence of traditional notions and ultra-revolutionary aspirations. It is not surprising, therefore, that realistic decisions of the Comintern sometimes failed to find understanding in the communist parties of oppressed countries. All that must be borne in mind if we wish properly to understand the relationships existing between the Comintern and the CPPI.

In the mid-1930s, CPPI documents still contain typical traits of leftist strategy (later to be overcome by Philippine Communists), a desire to bypass intermediate stages of the revolutionary process; renunciation of a differentiated approach to non-proletarian classes and sections; the identification of possible allies among the non-proletarian part of the population with irreconcilable enemies; an inability to see a principal difference between the fascist danger and the imperialist danger generally. Besides, the Party, underestimated the positive importance of the winning of Philippine autonomy in 1934. All that reflected the "infantile disorder of left-wing communism", as Lenin put it, which the Party only gradually cured itself of in the course of practical struggle. The sharply negative attitude of Philippine Communists to national bourgeois groups and their policy was in large measure due to the collusion of such groups

with the colonialists and their close ties with the landowning class.

Meanwhile, a regrouping of political forces was taking place in the country from the early 1930s: patriotic elements were stepping up their activity in the Nationalist Party and intensifying the struggle, however inconsistently, for national liberation. For a while the Communists did not take account of these shifts. The Party's position took some time to alter. The main thrust was, as hitherto, against national-reformists inclined towards compromise, against the Nationalist Party, and not against the dominance of colonialists and landowners. It took the CPPI some time to work out a programme for a united front (i.e., a democratic, anti-imperialist alliance of various forces acting for their class objectives and competing within the bounds of the alliance).

The first step towards a new strategy was made on 20 September 1936, when the CPPI declared itself ready to set up a Popular Front without making its establishment contingent on the working-class leadership of it. Communists made an appeal to all trade unions, peasant organisations, the Socialist Party, other organisations and parties, and progressive groups "among the middle-class intellectuals". The Popular Front programme advanced by the CPPI in domestic policy was realistic: it involved lower land rent, a ban on driving leaseholders off the land, restrictions on usury, expropriation of the big feudal landowners, help for the jobless. Struggle against the threat of imperialist war and fascism in 1936 was set, however, as a general task: the danger from militarist Japan was not yet fully appreciated.

A year after the CPPI had made this appeal, the American Communist James Allen sent a letter, in November 1937, to the leader of the Socialist Party of the Philippines, Pedro Abad Santos. The fact was that during his visit to the islands in early 1937 Allen was received by President of the autonomous Philippines Manuel Quezon, leader of the Nationalist Party who was then under left-wing pressure implementing a moderate but fairly practical programme of social reform. At first after his return to the USA Allen's view of Quezon's policy coincided with CPPI conclusions in the first half of the 1930s. He wrote about the "fascist tendencies" in Quezon's administration. But as a result of discussions in which U.S. and Philippine Communists took part, Allen's views underwent radical change. His letter to Abad Santos, moreover, reflected not only and not so much his personal views, as the position of the CPPI



and the Communist Party of the USA, a position which the Comintern shared. Only individual formulations actually belonged to Allen himself.

The letter said: "It became absolutely clear after 1931 that Japan was acting as the main imperialist foe of all peoples in the Far East. Today it is not the United States but Japan that is the main obstacle in the way of Philippine independence. Therefore, defence of the country from Japanese aggression is the immediate task in the fight for a democratic and independent Philippines.... The people must understand the direct danger threatening their national survival."

Allen felt that "unprincipled opposition to Quezon", "opposition without a programme" was dangerous, since agents of Japanese imperialism were using that sort of oppositionists in their own interests. The international situation had changed and it had become wrong in describing Quezon's action "to put stress on the anti-communist and dictatorial aspect of his administration". Quezon was pursuing an anti-Japanese policy which, however, was not active enough, since those in Washington, who were pulling the strings in the Quezon administration, were overcautious with Japan. At the same time, it was obvious that Quezon was not attempting to engage in behind-the-scenes intrigues with Japan. Allen also noted other positive changes in his policy. For example, the President had proposed to cut the transitional period to political independence. Such a policy deserved full support from progressives. Meanwhile, right-wingers, particularly pro-Japanese forces, were opposing the President's policy. The Popular Front's main fire was to be directed against them. The opposition of right-wing forces on the question of independence forced the President more vigorously to insist on the carrying out of "certain measures in the area of social reform".

Allen's letter contained a very important tactical idea: Quezon "should be forced to go further". If the President had begun to pay more attention to popular demands, that was in large measure due to the pressure of left-wingers. "This kind of opposition is positive if it puts forward specific demands and tries to enlist the support of all the progressive forces in a coalition party, including even the President himself. In the struggle between democracy and fascist tendencies, which is taking serious forms in the Philippines, too, a correct policy is to direct major blows against the most reactionary forces. In the Philippines such forces are pro-Japanese elements and the 'sugar barons'. All efforts had to be summoned to

prevent Quezon from being led by them and to try to involve him in the democratic front."

Allen's letter was an important milestone in the CPPI's shift to a new strategy, but the radical change was not yet made. As Allen informed the Comintern, owing to the CPPI's relative isolation, the lack of regular contacts with fraternal parties, as well as the fact that many CPPI leaders were still in exile, party activity up to the middle of 1938 retained much of its sectarian character. The Party continued to occupy a fundamentally anti-Quezon position (in Allen's words, "even in regard to the administration's progressive steps") and put forward slogans of "independence at any cost" which in the situation of mounting threat from militarist Japan in no way helped to unite the anti-fascist forces.

Communist contacts with the President demonstrated the fruitfulness of renouncing the "uncompromising policy" and the possibility of further changes in policy in favour of a united front.

The document Main Tasks of CPPI (June 1938) drawn up by representatives of the CPPI and the Communist Party of the USA played an exceptionally important part in the political reorientation of Philippine Communists. Its conclusions were subsequently confirmed in a resolution of the Comintern Secretariat adopted in February 1939. A real turn in the practical activity of Philippine Communists took place in the summer of 1938.

The Main Tasks of CPPI underlined the key problems facing the Philippine people. The principal task of Philippine Communists was to establish a national-democratic front, a general national coalition of all democratic and peace-loving forces that favoured democracy, improvement in people's living conditions, the safeguarding of Philippine national autonomy from the encroachments of aggressors. The authors of the document saw in this "the way to win complete independence on a firm and solid base". They also put forward a number of urgent demands: defence and extension of democratic rights, legislation on an eight-hour day and minimum wages, democratisation of the tax system, protection of national property from the monopolies, a ban on driving tenants from the land, laws against usury, and sequestration of monastery lands. The Party was recommended to mobilise the people in support of Quezon's progressive proposals and acts so as to have them put into effect. The Party was also recommended to reject those of Quezon's actions which would mean retreat



before the onslaught of reactionary and fascist elements. At the polls, the document said, electors ought to support one progressive candidate for each post irrespective of his party or group affiliation. "The securing of party legality is the direct and most urgent task," the document's authors stressed. They also mentioned the need to call a party congress in Manila in the immediate future and to announce there the Party's principles; they set the objective of merging with the Socialist Party and effecting "concerted action between the communist and socialist parties on all issues". It was suggested working out a programme on the peasant question, including proposals on agrarian reform, which were already being introduced by Quezon and peasant organisations.

Serious attention was given to communist work among the Catholics: "The Party must pursue a policy of 'extending a hand' to Catholics, establishing unity with Catholic workers and peasants. It had to put special stress on the fact that the Catholic Church had no right to control the political convictions and activity of Catholics, and that the Communist Party, as well as all democratic organisations would willingly accept Catholics into their ranks." The programme document of June 1938 gave specific interpretation of the Seventh Comintern Congress decisions as applied to the Philippine conditions.

Between 28 and 30 August 1938, the Enlarged Conference of the CPP Central Committee met to discuss and approve the document Main Tasks of CPPI and the statement made on its basis On Independence, Democracy and Peace. The Party's statement was published in its weekly newspaper *Kalayaan*. It also published some draft decisions of the future congress, in particular the Appeal to Our Brothers Catholics (25,000 copies) explaining the party position in regard to believers.

Bearing in mind the desire of the Socialist Party to unite with the CPPI, the Communist Party leadership on 12 October 1938 adopted a decision to hold the Third National Convention as a unity congress. It was suggested making the unification through Socialists accepting decisions of the convention, most of whose delegates would be Communists according to the proportional representation principle. On that day, 12 October, after a meeting with CPPI Politburo member Guillermo Capadocia, President Quezon gave the word for the convention to go ahead; it met between 29 and 31 October.

Party membership jumped sixfold between the announcement of its new policy and the opening of the convention. By

the time the convention opened the Party had 1,156 members in 101 organisations. Party cells were operating in eight provinces; 591 (51 per cent) members were workers, 399 (34 per cent) peasants, 166 (14 per cent) unemployed. Of the 274 delegates at the convention 57 represented the Socialist Party.

The convention met under the slogan "for a national-democratic front against reaction and Japanese aggression, for security, democracy, peace and freedom". The convention resolution "On Independence, Democracy and Peace" stated: "We cannot separate the fate of our country from that of humanity. A struggle is in progress worldwide between two major forces... The forces of democracy and peace stand opposed to fascism." It went on to say that the Philippines would be doomed to "national suicide" beforehand if it were to close its eyes to the danger of Japanese aggression.

In that fateful period in Philippine history, Communists were acting as an integral part of the international communist movement and as an advanced national force focusing the nation's attention on the urgent, vitally important task. That was the only proper policy. No matter what the main national problem might be—whether defence against fascism, resolution of the agrarian question, elimination of the landowner dominance—Communists invariably endeavoured, and still do endeavour, to be the vanguard force, fighting to solve that problem. It was on that policy that the agreed conclusions of the international communist movement, represented by the Comintern, oriented the communist parties.

The convention decisions noted the presence in the Philippines of elements which, under cover of the "Asia for Asians" slogan, were trying to portray Japan in the false light of liberator. Pro-Japanese elements were therefore branded as enemies of the people, betrayers of the cause of democracy and independence. The convention declared: "We are ready to put aside all our differences in the face of the nation's present position" to achieve the democratic unity of the people.

The convention adopted the Constitution of the Communist Party of the Philippines (as the Party was now called). Its preamble described the Party as the "political party of the working class" advocating the Philippines' right to independence; ready to develop democracy and attain independence based on democracy, to fight against aggression; to safeguard the direct interests of workers, peasants and all working people subjected to semi-feudal and capitalist exploitation;



and to prepare the working class for carrying out its historic mission.

The revolution on unity between the socialist and communist parties stated, in particular, that Philippine Socialists bore no responsibility for the policy of class collaboration being pursued by right-wing Social-Democrats in the West and had nothing in common with them. This statement was correct, since Philippine Socialists followed the principles of class struggle, favoured unity of peasants and workers in the revolutionary movement, advocated national and social emancipation. In actual fact, they were a peasant revolutionary party whose leaders took a Marxist stand on many questions. In joining together with the Socialist Party, Communists were extending their influence among the peasants. The Comintern Secretariat some months later assessed the merger of the two parties as a significant success in implementing the decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress.

In its resolution on organisational issues, the convention opposed leftist slogans that were unacceptable to the people. In its declaration-resolution On Force and Violence, the convention rejected "the thoughtless recourse to force to seize power by any minority" and condemned the "forcible imposition of socialism ... on the majority of the people".

Communists, the resolution said, were not terrorists, conspirators or anarchists. The people, however, would resort to violence if they found that the programme of reforms was only a demagogic ploy. The resolution set the task of fighting against fascist violence, to prevent the Philippines sharing the fate of Spain, Czechoslovakia, China and Ethiopia. Reactionaries who impinged upon the people's rights were the real apologists of violence. "If in future history the Philippines is to witness extensive actions of a violent character the responsibility will not lie with workers and peasants on whom the Party is relying, but on reactionaries and anti-communists."

The resolution on objectives of the peasant movement indicated the need to undermine the economic and political dominance of the landowners by means of a "thorough-going agrarian reform" which would lead to a fairer distribution of land, elimination of feudal vestiges, greater prosperity for the peasants and higher farm productivity. The entire programme could only be carried through with the active participation in it of the organised peasants. The big landowners, usurers and monopolists were the most reactionary forces blocking agrarian reform.

The Appeal to Our Brothers Catholics was of considerable importance; it was a document profoundly thought out both theoretically and tactically. Reactionary forces, it stressed, were trying to set Communists and Catholics against one another. The notion that they had contradictory interests was based on a misconception—Communists respected religious views. There were no grounds for disagreement, since both Communists and Catholics were in favour of "justice, truth and brotherhood", for a stronger family. In all bourgeois-democratic countries Catholics had the right to support any political party. Many French Catholics were supporters of the Popular Front. The Catholic hierarchy of the Philippines was closely bound up with the big feudal and semi-feudal agricultural set-up, but the bulk of Catholics supported not the hierarchy but the President when he had vetoed the law extending the church's influence to schools. "Indeed, most Communists are not Catholics, although an increasing number of Catholics are beginning to attach themselves to our Party." The Communist Party, the Appeal said, was in favour of freedom of religion and religious tolerance. Every Communist made up his own mind about his attitude to religion. The convention exposed reactionary attempts to portray the Communist Party as the enemy of the mass of religious people, and thereby to draw the latter into an anti-communist campaign. The "crusade against communism" was a slogan of the fascists in their attempt to seize power, said the convention document.

The policy of the Communist Party of the Philippines on the religious question was an integral part of its overall policy. It fully tied in with Lenin's conclusions on the attitude of Communists to religion. For example, Lenin had thought it necessary to combat Pan-Islamism as a political trend,<sup>1</sup> yet at the same time he demanded that Communists, in criticising Pan-Islamism, should observe caution, separating that criticism from the religious question.

The united front policy laid down in the Third Party Convention decision opened up new prospects for cooperation among national forces. In a talk with Allen in December 1938 President Quezon gave a good opinion of Evangelista and Capadocia as outstanding labour leaders who had never betrayed the interests of the working people. Quezon then told Allen that positive changes were taking place in the

<sup>1</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 149.



popular mood (he had in mind growth in a negative attitude to the slogan "independence at any cost" favoured by Japansophiles). He gave Communists credit for that. In reply, Allen confirmed that Communists did not want "independence at any cost", in view of the threat to the country from militarist Japan. For his part the President promised to do what he could to legalise the Party both centrally and locally and to set free those Communists who were still in exile (in fact, he fulfilled his promise soon after). The President of the autonomous Philippines told the American Communist: "The Philippines can learn a good deal from the Soviet Union, particularly in regard to the question of national reconstruction, farming and improving people's living standards."

At the end of February 1939 Evangelista acquainted the Comintern Executive with the draft resolution of the CPP Central Committee, and it was approved.

The Comintern Secretariat recommended the Communist Party of the Philippines always to act resolutely as the most consistent advanced fighter for the social and national interests of the working class and the whole people. The corresponding decision of the Secretariat was signed by ECCI General Secretary Georgi Dimitrov and Secretariat members Klement Gottwald, Otto Kuusinen and Wilhelm Florin.

The decision emphasised that advocating the complete independence of the Philippines meant above all recognising militarist Japan as the most dangerous enemy of the Philippine people. The ECCI believed that the people of the Philippines should have the sovereign right to use repressive measures in relation both to American and to other imperialists who abused their privileges in the Philippines or used their property to harm and exploit the Philippine people. Further, the Comintern supported the traditional demand of Philippine Communists to expropriate the large landowners and outlined the task of setting up a broad national-democratic front, with progressive points of Quezon's "social justice programme" serving as its basis.

The President, and that was clearly understood by Communists, could never be regarded as a consistent defender of democracy. More than that, he had displayed a marked bias towards totalitarianism. Communists had no illusions also about his very limited "social justice programme".

Nonetheless, the Communist Party of the Philippines saw its objective, in line with the Comintern, as relying on the people and putting mounting pressure on the President from

the left, to induce him to more consistent implementation of the progressive points in his programme. As Allen wrote to the Comintern Executive, "The overall political prospect is to establish mass support for the progressive aspects of the administration's policy, trying at the same time to influence that policy in a more decisive democratic direction, to isolate the reactionary forces around the President and to create national-democratic unity around him." Such was the general standpoint of the Comintern, the Communist Party of the Philippines and the Communist Party of the USA.

Guided by the decisions of its Third Convention, the CPP was able to win important positions among the workers of Manila and the peasants of Luzon in a situation of upsurge in the worker and peasant movement. Communists actively came out against anti-democratic tendencies in Quezon's policy, demanded a firm line in averting Japanese aggression and in preparing to ward it off; in everyday political and economic contention with the propertied classes they defended democratic rights and the class interests of workers and peasants. Correct strategy ensured them growing popular support necessary for further advances along the road mapped out by the Third CPP Convention.

The Fourth Party Convention took place in Manila between 7 and 10 November 1940; 422 delegates attended. The convention examined the political report of the Central Committee and heard reports on work within the trade unions and peasant organisations. A new 15-strong Central Committee was elected. Evangelista became the CC General Secretary and Abad Santos the Chairman of the Party. On 25 February 1941 Evangelista wrote to the Comintern that the Party's political influence among the mass of working people (and above all the peasants) was continuing to increase. More than 21,000 members were in the National Confederation of Farm Workers, led by the Party, at the time of the Fourth Convention. This influence over the peasants was to have great importance for the Party's activity during World War II and after the expulsion of Japanese invaders from the Philippines.

##### 5. COMINTERN AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA (IN THE 1925-1927 NATIONAL REVOLUTION)

The 1925-1927 Chinese revolution was anti-imperialist and anti-feudal. The people, who had risen up to fight under the leadership of the national-revolutionary Kuomintang, were



opposing the dominance of the imperialists and reactionary militarists and landowners associated with them, as well as against the country's division which enhanced its semi-colonial exploitation. During the revolution, the Communist Party of China, relying mainly on the workers, sharply increased its influence and membership. The Party was one of the most active forces of the revolution.

As long as the Kuomintang remained a revolutionary force, the Communist International oriented the Communist Party of China on backing the Kuomintang, but at the same time on pursuing an independent class policy with a view to developing the revolution to a higher stage. The united front policy, which the Comintern had recommended to Eastern Communists, was being put to the test in China. Bearing in mind the importance of that fact, this section of the book will analyse the strategy and tactics of the Comintern during the national revolution in China.

Having arisen as a result of the merger of communist groups, the Communist Party of China, in a situation of a revolutionary upsurge, did not think it necessary for quite a long time to work "*wherever the masses are to be found*", i.e., within the Kuomintang. The Comintern rendered the young Party constant assistance, advising it to work within the Kuomintang so that Communists would pave the way to the people and help the Kuomintang fully to realise its anti-imperialist potential. Back in the summer of 1922 the Comintern had recommended Chinese Communists to join the Kuomintang. On 12 January 1923 the Comintern Executive had adopted a detailed resolution "On the Relations Between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang" which said that "action between the Kuomintang and the young CPC should be co-ordinated".<sup>1</sup> The specific form of this coordination was for Communists to join the Kuomintang, while strictly retaining the Party's political and organisational independence.

The leadership of the Party which, from July 1922, had become a section of the Comintern, displayed strong antagonism to cooperation with the Kuomintang. Only after overcoming leftist resistance did the Third Party Congress in June 1923 adopt an official decision on Communists entering the Kuomintang

and thereby recognised it as an organisational form of a united national front. Constant contacts existed between the Comintern Executive and the Kuomintang, whose leader was the great Chinese revolutionary democrat Sun Yat-sen.

In the autumn of 1923, during the visit to Moscow of a delegation representing the Kuomintang, the ECCI Presidium adopted a resolution "On the National Liberation Movement in China and the Kuomintang", which explained the Comintern position on the "three popular principles" of Sun Yat-sen—nationalism, democracy and state socialism—and contained advice to the Kuomintang. Nationalism should be understood as the fight against imperialism, for China's independence, relying on wide sections of the peasants, workers, intellectuals and commercial-industrial circles; liberation from imperialist tyranny should not result in the local bourgeoisie coming to power. Democracy was interpreted as a principle which should serve the interests of the working people of China and those groups of the population who were fighting against imperialism. According to the Comintern, state socialism implied nationalisation of the property of foreign capitalists. It expressed the hope that the Kuomintang would act in concert with the Communist Party of China, the class-political organisation of the Chinese proletariat.

The First Congress of the Kuomintang, held in January 1924, signalled the organisation of a united national front. Influenced by Sun Yat-sen, it adopted the Comintern interpretation of the "three popular principles". The Comintern advice on agrarian revolution was not adopted, since the land-owning elements in the Kuomintang nationalist party wielded very strong influence (as also elements of the bourgeoisie associated with the landowners).

Energetic activity of Communists within the Kuomintang encouraged it to become a more mass and organised party with an anti-imperialist programme.

The effectiveness of that activity, however, was considerably reduced in so far as leftist tendency in the Communist Party Central Committee continued to prevail and was expressed in an attempt to turn the Party into the leading force of the Kuomintang or to break with it and win away its mass base. Those intentions, which were particularly evident at the Fourth Congress in January 1925, were quite unrealistic: the Kuomintang had become a bloc of diverse socio-political forces headed by the national-bourgeois and bourgeois-landowning groups which had no intention of ceding leadership of the

<sup>1</sup> *The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Selected and Edited by Jane Degras*, Vol. 2, Oxford University Press, London, 1960, p. 6.



party and of revolution to the Communists; the Kuomintang's popularity had risen and acquired nationwide scope.<sup>1</sup>

A national revolution began in China in May 1925. Its moving forces were various classes of Chinese society: the national bourgeoisie, part of the landowning class, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the working class and the peasantry. The Kuomintang was the political leader of the revolutionary forces.

Should we consider the Kuomintang of that time, when it was a national-revolutionary organisation, a bourgeois (or bourgeois-landowner) party? The whole question is how to understand the term "bourgeois party" or "bourgeois-landowner party". Of course, inasmuch as the bourgeoisie and landowners have undivided political sway over the people in a particular party the mass nature of that party, even if working people make up the great bulk of its membership, does not in itself change its bourgeois or bourgeois-landowner nature. The Kuomintang at the time was a bloc party and within that bloc a contest for political supremacy was going on. The various forces forming the bloc retained a certain independence and freedom of manoeuvre. Bourgeois and landowner groups, closely linked with the new militarist forces (headed by Chiang Kaishek and his entourage), were undoubtedly the most organised and influential force within that national-revolutionary party. But other real political forces, including the Communist Party, were taking part in the fight for hegemony within the Kuomintang. In the situation when the fighting people had their own organisations, while increasing the strength of the Kuomintang, they still retained certain political autonomy within its bounds, an opportunity for independent political action, and showed a very definite intention of exerting strong influence on the organisation's leaders.<sup>2</sup> This is what distin-

<sup>1</sup> One is bound, of course, to bear in mind that the ruling group of the Kuomintang was trying to undermine the Communists' influence, ousting them from the Kuomintang or converting the Communist Party into its appendage. This policy of Kuomintang leaders objectively encouraged leftist sentiments within the Party.

<sup>2</sup> Palmiro Togliatti, for example, regarded the national-revolutionary Kuomintang as "something bigger" than a party. He saw it as a broad organisation within whose framework a struggle was underway for various political forces to prevail. This idea was diametrically opposed to that of Trotsky who believed that the Kuomintang was nothing but the ordinary bourgeois-landowner party, while the working people, who had their own organisations and operated within the Kuomintang, were nothing but the "herd", as he put it.

guished the Kuomintang from an ordinary bourgeois (or bourgeois-landowner) party. The fact that bourgeois-landowner groups had struck a deal with militarist counter-revolution and subsequently became entrenched in the Kuomintang and turned it into a reactionary force, does not give ground for asserting that it had earlier been the ordinary bourgeois (or bourgeois-landowner) party.

With the upsurge in the liberation movement in China the Comintern oriented its sections on giving practical assistance to the national-revolutionary forces in China.

Immediately after the events of 30 May 1925 (the anti-imperialist demonstration of Shanghai workers and students signalling the beginning of the revolution), the Comintern Presidium analysed the situation and, on 17 June, sent a telegram to communist parties of capitalist countries. The telegram said that in connection with events in China and the overt armed intervention of the imperialists, mainly British and Japanese, the Comintern and Profintern leadership, apart from taking a number of steps to aid the people of China, called upon communist parties to do their utmost to draw public opinion to the struggle of the Chinese people for their independence, to organise protest meetings and to collect funds together with Socialists and non-party workers under the following slogans: 1) expel the imperialists from China; 2) abolish treaties degrading China; 3) abolish the extra-territorial principle; 4) satisfy the striking workers' demands; 5) immediate prosecution of those responsible for shooting workers and students in Shanghai, Hankow, Tsingtao and elsewhere.

The intervention of the Comintern helped to unite anti-imperialist forces of both oppressed and oppressor countries and create a base for concerted support action by worker parties in the West; this was a vivid manifestation of the united front tactics. The Comintern position helped to involve hundreds and thousands of people in the movement to aid the Chinese people. The "Hands Off China" movement spread throughout the world. Protest meetings took place in France, Germany, the USA, Great Britain, Austria, Japan, Czechoslovakia, Korea, Italy, Egypt, Turkey and elsewhere.

Even before the revolution a system of relations between the Comintern and the Communist Party of China on the one hand, and the Kuomintang on the other, typical of the later period, was taking shape. The Comintern and Communists rendered support to the Kuomintang not as a worker-peasant



party—which it was not—but as a party of national revolution. The Kuomintang leadership, on its part, tried to convince the Comintern that the Kuomintang was precisely a worker-peasant or even a proletarian party.

At the end of 1925, Kuomintang representative Hu Hanmin came to Moscow and had several talks with Comintern officials. Hu informed the Comintern Executive Committee that he represented the left wing of the Kuomintang. In his opinion and that of Chiang Kaishek, the right wing of the organisation would soon revert to counter-revolutionary positions. Hu asked the Comintern to help the revolutionary wing of the Kuomintang to draft a programme, to work out a theory based on the "principles of world revolution". There is little doubt that Hu represented, in fact, Chiang Kaishek and the leading lights of the Kuomintang, and had instructions to depict the Kuomintang as a political power much closer to the Communists than it actually was. This was understandable. The Comintern, after all, enjoyed the powerful support of the USSR, a country headed by working people and the Communist Party. In turning to the Comintern, the Kuomintang, which at that time was opposing imperialism and reactionary-militarist groups, counted on ensuring effective aid for itself from the international communist movement. For its part, the Comintern had grounds to regard the appeal from the national-revolutionary Kuomintang for help and advice as an aspect of the establishment of a united front of anti-imperialist forces. An extensive anti-imperialist movement led by the Kuomintang was then underway in China and the Kuomintang possessed considerable armed force. Victory for the national revolution in China, the Comintern felt, which it assumed would be won with the Communist Party taking a vanguard part, would seriously change the balance of forces between imperialism and socialism on a world scale. At the same time, it reckoned that victory for the national revolution in China would only complete the first stage of revolution. And the more consistent and decisive that victory would be, the greater the possibility for a transition to the next stage—the establishment of a popular, revolutionary-democratic stage. Meanwhile, the Executive Committee was perfectly and increasingly aware that the Kuomintang represented a mixture of political groupings with a bourgeois-landowner leadership, that right-wing and intermediate forces were strong in it and that the final political position of what was still generally a revolutionary organisation would depend on the outcome of struggle between its constituent elements.

During his talks with the Executive Committee representatives Hu maintained that the Kuomintang considered the bourgeoisie a counter-revolutionary force; therefore, it did not want an alliance with it; the tasks of the Communist Party of China and the Kuomintang did not differ in principle and it was therefore possible for the Kuomintang to merge into the Communist Party at some point in the future; but for the time being a national liberation movement was underway in China and the Kuomintang was needed for that transitional period; in so far as both peasants and workers constituted the proletariat in China, the Kuomintang also was a "proletarian party" striving to join the Comintern. Hu's game was uncomplicated. He did all he could to "dress up" the Kuomintang in communist garb, trying thereby to prove that the existence and activity of the Communist Party was essentially unnecessary. Leftist phraseology was meant to cover up subversion against the independence and the very existence of the Communist Party. The Comintern saw through the plan. As Hu was told, it followed from his words that one of the two parties—the Kuomintang or the Communist Party—was superfluous. The Comintern, adhering to Lenin's tactics, was in favour of a revolutionary alliance of the Communist Party and the Kuomintang, but it felt that they needed to demarcate themselves and clearly define their respective aims and tasks. The Kuomintang was advocating an independent China with a revolutionary-democratic government which would take upon itself the satisfaction of the minimum demands of hundreds of millions of peasants and workers. As far as the Communist Party was concerned, it was a party of the proletariat. Its goal was for the working class to win power, and its immediate political task was the victory of the national-revolutionary movement in China. Here the tasks of the Communist Party and the Kuomintang were similar: there lay the basis for an alliance. The Communist Party, however, had to remain an independent class party. And in that event the Comintern applied the dialectical Leninist formula of an alliance of Communists with democrats of the East while strictly retaining the political independence of the communist and worker movement.

During Hu's meetings with representatives of the Comintern Executive and its Eastern Section, they also discussed the question of what sort of government China would have after the victory of the national revolution. The Comintern, naturally, thought it would not be dictatorship of the proletariat. Mean-



while, bourgeois-parliamentary democracy would not satisfy the aspirations of the common people who had risen to revolution. What would then be the form of revolutionary government? Although the appropriate term was not used during the talks, the Comintern representatives undoubtedly had in mind a national-democratic state of a transitional type, i.e., government of a bloc of revolutionary anti-imperialist forces. They drew Hu's attention also to the importance for the future government of the national question and the need to take a cautious approach to it.

Thus, the Kuomintang's attempt to dissolve the Communist Party within a national-revolutionary organisation failed. Chinese Communists continued to fight to strengthen their positions within the Kuomintang. Of course, the designs of leftists in the Party to head the Kuomintang in the immediate future and to turn it into an organisation controlled by Communists were utopian, while their tactics of ousting non-Communist Kuomintang members from all leading posts were simply reckless. But is it correct to maintain in that connection that the Party was making a strategic mistake in striving in the long term to take charge of the united national front? One can hardly give an affirmative answer to that simply on the grounds that the Party suffered a serious setback in 1927. If in a revolutionary situation the Party had staked only on "equal" cooperation with the Kuomintang, then that cooperation with a far superior force could, in fact, have meant only subordination of the Party to the Kuomintang. What is more, such a policy would have pushed the Party away from considerable numbers of ordinary people who had turned to it during the revolution precisely because it was a party capable of giving the people more than the Kuomintang could; it would have blunted the people's energy and hampered the revolution.

Meanwhile, by taking part therefore in the anti-imperialist front, Communists were thereby trying to make the revolution more resolute and consistent, to gain influence among the working people and, relying upon them, to move the revolution on to the next stage. We cannot but note that a certain hurriedness marked the actions of the Party in campaigning for leadership of the united front.

Between 1925 and 1926 the Kuomintang leadership often posed the question of affiliating the party to the Comintern. The first official approach was made in February 1926. It was made by Hu Hanmin while in Moscow. He explained

the suggestion by the fact that the Kuomintang, in his words, accepted the idea of an alliance of the world proletariat with oppressed peoples. In March the Kuomintang representative received the official reply which said that the time had not yet come for the Kuomintang to join the Comintern, although the ECCI Presidium was prepared to examine the question at the Sixth Plenum. In other words, the reply was essentially in the negative.

In September 1926, another Kuomintang representative, Shao Lizi, came to Moscow. He communicated the following proposal from Chiang Kaishek to the Comintern: in return for Chiang recognising the Comintern as "leader of the world revolution", the Comintern should recognise Kuomintang leadership of the revolution in China (Chiang, naturally, was referring to the military-political ruling top of the party led by him). His representative again inferred that the Communist Party of China "was not needed". Chiang was very interested in having the Kuomintang admitted to the Comintern. At that time the Northern Campaign of the National-Revolutionary Army (NRA) had already begun against the reactionary militarist groups, and Chiang was therefore particularly in need of support. At the same time, he wanted to paralyse the Communist Party in which he saw a rival. Once again the Comintern Executive saw the real significance of Chiang's plan.

Shao Lizi delivered a letter to the Comintern suggesting that it and the Kuomintang exchange representatives. In January 1927 the ECCI Presidium debated the question of Kuomintang representation in the Comintern and passed it on to the Small Commission. It was decided to send a letter to the Comintern representatives in China to ask for their opinion and the position of the Communist Party leadership on the issue. No reply was forthcoming from China, and the perfidy of Chiang Kaishek in April 1927 naturally put an end to any negotiations on the matter.

So, on the whole the Comintern position at that time on the Kuomintang joining the Comintern was not to give Chiang an abrupt and categorical refusal that could be used against the Communist Party, and not to accept the Kuomintang into the Comintern even as a "sympathiser".

The Sixth Plenum of the Enlarged Comintern Executive Committee of February-March 1926 adopted a detailed resolution on the Chinese revolution.

It described the Kuomintang as "a revolutionary bloc of



the workers, peasants, intellectuals and urban democracy on the basis of a community of the class interests of these strata in the struggle against the imperialists and the whole militarist-feudal order for the independence of the country and for a single revolutionary-democratic Government".<sup>1</sup> The Plenum oriented the Communist Party of China on supporting the formation of the revolution's military forces and on democratisation of the army. The resolution referred to the peasant question as "the fundamental problem of the Chinese national-liberation movement".<sup>2</sup> It underlined that political self-determination of the Chinese Communists would develop in a conflict against two equally harmful deviations. On the one hand, there was the right-wing liquidationist deviation; attempts to blur the fundamental distinctions between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang. On the other hand, there were extreme "left moods which try to skip over the revolutionary-democratic stage of the movement straight to the tasks of proletarian dictatorship and Soviet power, forgetting all about the peasantry, which is the most important and decisive factor of Chinese national-liberation movement".<sup>3</sup> It went on to stress the need for Chinese Communists to unite the peasantry under slogans reflecting political and economic demands close to it and to link these demands with the general political tasks of struggle against imperialists and militarists.

Meanwhile important political events were in progress in China. In the spring of 1926 Chiang Kaishek had prepared a military-political conspiracy against the Communists in Canton. That had taken place at a time when the Communists had strengthened their positions within the Kuomintang. Part of the Communists in Canton even thought of seizing the leadership of the Kuomintang and gaining hegemony over the mass movement—not as a long-term goal, but as an immediate objective.

On 20 March Chiang engineered a coup in Canton directed against the Communists; power in this revolutionary base was seized by the Kuomintang military clique, while the worker and peasant organisations in Guangdong were put under stringent control. Chiang, however, had not yet made the

route of the Party and the mass worker and peasant organisations his immediate goal. He was bound to realise that if he tried that, the possibility of a successful advance northwards by his army—the Kuomintang had by that time been already preparing the Northern Campaign—would be sharply curtailed and perhaps even reduced to naught, since the Kuomintang army needed mass support. In carrying out the coup, Chiang was also unable to go too far because he realised that the step would mean no more help from the Soviet government. After the 20 March coup the Communist Party continued to exist, to fight and to extend its influence. The fate of the revolution was to be decided in further struggle.<sup>1</sup>

In July 1926 the Northern Campaign began. The National-Revolutionary Army moved towards Central China overcoming resistance of the armies of militarists. At the same time there was an upsurge in the mass worker-peasant struggle. The plan of the Northern Campaign had been drawn up by a group of Soviet military experts.

In January 1927 a Kuomintang government was already entrenched in Wuhan; then the NRA turned eastwards—towards Nanking and Shanghai; half the country's territory was soon under Kuomintang control.

The Plenum of the CPC Central Committee had taken place in July 1926, after the Northern Campaign began; it had come to the following, completely justified, conclusion: the Party was still at an intermediate stage "between small organisations and a mass party". The leftist group, however, overestimated the Party's strength and thought that after the assault on Communists on 20 March the Kuomintang no longer posed a serious political threat. This was a typically leftist mode of thought: an attack on Communists objectively is an attack on the people, and the people are bound to see it as such. But for the people to reach that conclusion they have to identify the Communist Party's policy with their own interests. Yet this only comes after several years and, in many cases, after decades of struggle by Communists for the people.

<sup>1</sup> *Theses and Resolutions Adopted at the VI Session of the Enlarged E.C.C.I. 17 February-15 March, 1926*, See: *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 6, No. 40, 13 May 1926, p. 648.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 649.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>1</sup> The events of the spring of 1926 are indicative also because it was the first case in history in which national-bourgeois groups of an imperialist-oppressed country had got together with a military group to counter the sharply mounting influence of a communist party. Subsequently, the bourgeoisie in the East would frequently resort to such a ploy.



And the Chinese Communists were still a long way from achieving that level of mass influence.

At the July Plenum of the Party CC, the leftists once again proposed that the Party withdraw from the Kuomintang. But the Plenum demurred.

By the commencement of the Northern Campaign, the CPC had more than 11,000 members, of whom 66% were workers, 22% intellectuals and only 5% peasants. The Party also had a Communist Youth League with some 10,000 members. So the Party had become a real force to be reckoned with. In addition, Communists commanded some of the NRA units. This marked growth in membership and influence of the Party had taken place during the revolution. And as the Northern Campaign got underway the number of Party members continued quickly to grow. By March 1927 it had as many as 58,000 members, 53.8% of whom were workers, 18.7% peasants, 19.1% intellectuals and 3.1% armymen. Trade unions accounting for considerable numbers of workers as well as innumerable peasant associations also came under Party influence.

The Seventh Plenum of the Enlarged Comintern Executive Committee which met in November and December 1926 marked a very important stage in working out the strategy and tactics of the Comintern in regard to the Chinese revolution. It described the revolution as being anti-imperialist, bourgeois-democratic, ultimately destined to lead the Chinese people to liberation from foreign tyranny, to unification of the country, to the establishment of revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the working class and the peasantry, to a resolution of questions concerning nationalisation of the land and confiscation of property belonging to foreign capital. In elaborating this proposition, the Comintern believed that at that moment the Chinese revolution was passing through a general national stage and that the bourgeois-democratic revolution in China was only at the initial stage of its development when its moving forces were the proletariat, the peasantry, petty and middle bourgeoisie, as well as part of the big bourgeoisie, all forming a broad anti-imperialist bloc.<sup>1</sup> Plenum decisions formulated agrarian demands of a transitional nature: maximum lowering of land rent, abolition of crippling taxes, confiscation of land from counter-revolutionary landowners, i.e., it confirmed those slogans which had been advanced by the July Plenum

of the CPC Central Committee. At the same time it also put forward the long-term goal of land nationalisation.

In working out tactics on revolution in China, the Comintern found the correct approach to several salient theoretical and practical problems which were facing the communist movement for the first time. It made an important contribution to developing Marxist ideas, underlining the general national nature of the 1925-1927 revolution in China at its first stage. What was novel was also the heightening of the autonomous, as it were, and often deciding role of the military factor in that revolution. So, too, was the profound and accurate description of Chinese militarism elaborated by the Commission on the Chinese Question at the Seventh Enlarged ECCI Plenum.<sup>1</sup>

In weighing up the overall prospects for the Chinese revolution, the ECCI Plenum noted that "its results will not necessarily create those socio-political conditions which lead to a capitalist development of the country". The state set up as a result of that revolution "will not be merely a bourgeois-democratic State. It will represent the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat, the peasantry and other exploited classes". The Plenum was in session at a time when the NRA was winning victory after victory over the troops of the militarists—the bastion of imperialist influence in China; it noted that imperialist intervention was being stepped up, that conditions in the country were specific and, in that connection, national revolution "differs in substance both from the classic bourgeois revolutions of Western European countries in the last century, as well as from the 1905 revolution in Russia". The Plenum pointed to a rapid process of regrouping of social forces taking part in the national liberation movement and to the historical inevitability of a transition of a large part of the bourgeoisie to the side of counter-revolution; it described the agrarian question as the "central problem of the present situation" and outlined a specific programme of demands designed "to draw the vast working masses into the struggle" and strengthen its position in the national revolution

<sup>1</sup> The Comintern took an active part also in working out the idea of revolutionary bases or support points, important for Chinese conditions, which could be set up in various parts of a vast country with a very loose political structure. Soon after the Plenum the idea was put forward of creating major support bases in North-West China where, as the Chinese party leadership emphasises there was less danger of intervention, where there was contact with and support from the USSR.

<sup>1</sup> See: *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 7, No. 44, pp. 983-85.



and win the peasantry to the side of revolution,<sup>1</sup> it listed the most important general democratic tasks of the Chinese revolution; it particularly stressed the importance of both a constant and decisive battle by Communists against right-wing groups of the Kuomintang striving to turn it into a bourgeois-landowner party and of cooperation with its left wing.

After Chiang's coup in Canton of 20 March 1926, the Comintern came to the conclusion that sooner or later Chiang would turn against the Chinese revolutionary forces. The Seventh Plenum noted that as the revolution developed and intensified, the big bourgeoisie would come to feel that further anti-imperialist struggle would menace its interests and it would move away from revolution and try to crush it. The task of Communists, as the Plenum decision indicated, was to play for time necessary to promote the revolution further, to strengthen the Party and repulse the counter-revolutionary onslaught being prepared.

The decision of the Seventh ECCI Plenum was undoubtedly a complex document.

On the one hand, it laid stress on a united front, on the need to preserve a bloc with the national bourgeoisie and the army, in whose officer corps landowner elements were strong; on the other hand, it pointed to the need to activate the peasant movement for land so as to prepare for the unavoidable head-on clash with bourgeois-landowner forces. The CPC leaders were trying to resolve the problem of combining these aspects by adopting realistic decisions at each particular moment, by overcoming the practical difficulties with the help of a flexible policy which could postpone the inevitable clash between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang until the time when the balance of forces would be more favourable to the Party. Together with Comintern representatives in China, the CPC was acting in very difficult circumstances: since the end of 1926, Chiang Kaishek, continuing successful military action against the reactionary militarists, was preparing an attack on the Communist Party with increasing obviousness.

In such conditions the only possible—through intricate—course was chosen. If the Comintern, as countless numbers of bourgeois and reformist historians now “advise”, had oriented the Communist Party of China on renouncing the struggle

<sup>1</sup> See: *The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Selected and Edited by Jane Degras*, Vol. 2, pp. 342, 340, 343, 386.

for hegemony in the unfolding revolution, that would actually have meant the dissolution of the Party in the Kuomintang and its self-disbandment; if the Comintern had recommended the Party to break with the united front and to seek a confrontation with Chiang Kaishek—which Trotskyites urged it to do—the military would have set upon the Party straightaway.

Bearing in mind the specific situation, the Communist Party of China with the help of the Comintern was able for considerable time, without succumbing to provocation and while retaining the bloc with the Kuomintang, to command still greater authority in the united front and to strengthen the positions of the Wuhan Kuomintang group (in view of the growing threat of Chiang establishing a military dictatorship, this group was endeavouring to gather mass support and was at that time advocating democratic changes). The question of the “hegemony of the proletariat and its party or the dictatorship of Chiang Kaishek” depended on the balance of real forces.

The Communist Party suffered a serious setback on 12 April 1927: Chiang Kaishek engineered a military coup in Shanghai.<sup>1</sup>

By the spring of 1927, when Chiang had headed for a clean break with the united anti-imperialist front, he obviously had the upper hand. That was due to many circumstances. Wide popular support continued to back the Kuomintang which had only recently been revolutionary. Many supporters of the Communist Party would not have followed it if it had not subscribed to the revolutionary principles of the Kuomintang. The vast bulk of the army commanders were under the influence of the bourgeois-landowner Kuomintang leadership.

<sup>1</sup> It has to be said that at that time over 170 warships of Britain, Japan, the USA, France and other imperialist states were concentrated in Chinese waters. The British and American ships bombed Nanking on 24 March; on 6 April, troops of Zhang Zuolin broke into the Soviet Embassy in Beijing, seized a group of Chinese Communists and subjected them to torture before executing them; on 11 April, the imperialist states presented Chiang with an ultimatum demanding that he punish those responsible for actions against foreigners; finally, in the night of 12 April, Chiang, acting in collusion with the imperialists and their armed forces, arrested more than a thousand Communists and revolutionary workers; in the morning mercenaries disarmed worker detachments in Shanghai and a “white terror” commenced. It was a coup that determined the destiny of the revolution. On 18 April, Chiang set up his government in Nanking and a military dictatorship was established over the substantial territory controlled by the NRA. A left Kuomintang government headed by Wang Jinwei was instituted in Wuhan.



The Communist Party was not strong enough yet to quell effectively the counter-revolutionary coup and the supporters of military dictatorship. In addition, the Party was having to deal with an experienced, cruel and at the same time still mass-supported foe. The class confrontation, as the Comintern had foreseen, was inevitable. Victory in April 1927 went to an objectively much stronger side—the bourgeois-landowning hierarchy of the Kuomintang which had joined forces with the military.

Inasmuch as bourgeois and reformist historiography, along with the Trotskyites, never tires of maintaining that the Comintern was inclined artificially to "hold back" the peasant movement in China and thereby to encourage the defeat of revolution and the Communist Party, let us turn to the facts defining the Comintern position in regard to the struggle of the Chinese peasantry.

What were the slogans and the scope of that struggle, its major stages and Party policy on the peasant question?

As the Northern Campaign developed, a wave of peasant demonstrations began more and more to sweep China. It was exactly when the NRA began its campaign in July 1926 that the CPC Central Committee passed a resolution noting that in various parts of the country the peasant movement was being united by common protest against excessive requisitions, against extortion of taxes ahead of time, against corrupt officials, and by common demand for freedom of organisation, for establishing armed self-defence detachments, etc. The Plenum postponed approval of the Party agrarian programme until its congress, and advanced only the most topical demands, and in particular the establishment of minimum land rent. It believed that the peasant thrust should be against the "worst" landowners. Immediately after the Northern Campaign had begun, the Party published a statement in which that resolution was set out.

During the Northern Campaign, in the autumn of 1926, the Kuomintang had adopted a programme on the peasant question. It envisaged the lowering of land rent by 25% in liberated areas. The bourgeois-landowner leadership of the Kuomintang which was increasingly consolidating its positions, had no intention of fulfilling that programme; the Communists, however, used it for work among the peasants. The number of peasant associations continued to grow. For example, in October 1926 there were more than 6,000 members of peasant associations in Jiangxi, and as many as 300,000 after the

arrival of revolutionary troops. The membership of peasant associations in Hunan grew particularly quickly (to over 5 million by April 1927). But the peasant associations had only come into being on a mass scale and over a more or less long period in those areas controlled by the NRA.

In March 1927 the Third Plenum of the Kuomintang Central Executive Committee adopted a resolution agreeing to the formation of district and regional bodies of peasant self-government and to a considerable cut in land rent. It announced its support for the peasants in their battle for land. The draft law on the agrarian question envisaged that the land confiscated from the landowners would be shared out on a per capita basis. The military hierarchy, however, threw their full weight against the bill. Initially the Central Executive Committee Commission approved it; land of the big landowners was to be divided up among the landless and land-hungry peasants and there were to be local peasant self-government bodies. But the draft legislation ratified by the Commission was soon buried.

The Fifth Congress of the Communist Party of China, meeting between April and May 1927 (i.e., after the Chiang-inspired coup and the formation of a left Kuomintang government in Wuhan), discussed the agrarian question among other things. The left-wingers called for the immediate promotion of the "land to the peasants" slogan which essentially meant a demand for confiscating all the landowners' lands. The Congress adopted a resolution which stated that relations in the countryside still retained their feudal character and that it was necessary to confiscate public, patrimonial and monastic lands that were leased out, and to transfer them to the peasants. Land belonging to NRA officers was not to be confiscated. This was not a call to agrarian revolution, but a programme which in Chinese conditions was quite radical. While the peasant struggle continued to grow, in several provinces (especially in Hunan and Hubei) it ran into increasingly cruel repression from the reactionary military hierarchy. Intensification of class antagonism caused some misgiving among left-wing Kuomintang members who still favoured a bloc with the Communists.

After the Congress Communist Party leaders, fearing that the peasant demonstrations would scare the left Kuomintang government and push it into the camp of Chiang Kaishek, and hoping that it would agree to carry out a radical land reform, began to put the brake on the peasant movement,



restrain its pressure (although the Party did not renounce its agrarian demands). At the same time as the generals were breaking up the peasant associations, the CPC Central Committee distanced itself from the "peasant excesses" and announced that the "counter-revolutionaries" bore responsibility for them. In early July it announced that worker-peasant organisations should be controlled by the Kuomintang. On 14 July the Comintern Executive passed a resolution on the current situation in the Chinese revolution, insistently recommending the Communist Party of China to act as organiser of agrarian revolution. But the Kuomintang Central Executive Committee had already broken off relations with the Party on 15 July.

Thus, the peasant movement in China during the Northern Campaign acquired a mass character (by April 1927, according to the CPC Central Committee's statistics, the peasant associations had some ten million members); but the peasants rose up to fight only when units of the NRA arrived; what is more, their movement frequently acquired a scope and forms that were diametrically opposed to the interests and plans of the Kuomintang and its army command.

On territory controlled after the Shanghai coup by the Wuhan government, the peasant movement continued to grow, but here too it was not aimed at eliminating the landowning class. This resulted from the very nature of agrarian relations in China and, in particular, from the presence of a vast mass of land paupers. The peasant mass was not, however, unanimous on land division. Some of the rural poor supported the middle peasants—tenant farmers and homesteaders who, together with rich peasants and landowners, feared the mass of paupers hankering after their property. Meanwhile, in many districts of China the major form of exploitation was money-lending, commerce taxes, and not ground rent; and the Chinese landowner, as a rule, was not the owner of large lands. Therefore, the Chinese countryside in the anti-feudal revolution was not clearly demarcated into landowners and peasants.

The claim by Trotskyites, later taken up by many bourgeois and reformist historians, that the land was ablaze beneath the landowners all over China from the very start of the Northern Campaign, and that the peasants everywhere were seizing power, acting as a force ready to defeat the NRA successfully, is a crude distortion of reality.

What were the practical recommendations of the Comintern on agrarian policy in China?

In an attempt to prove that the Comintern allegedly ham-

pered the agrarian revolution in China, Trotskyites played up the fact that on 26 October 1926 the Comintern sent the Communist Party of China a document which noted that intensification of the struggle against the Chinese bourgeoisie and rural hierarchy was premature and dangerous at that stage.

Such an intensification, the document went on to say, pushed the bourgeoisie, the merchants and village well-to-do towards the imperialists and militarists; while the danger from the imperialists and militarists exists and struggle with them was inevitable in the long term, the Kuomintang had to retain all its possible allies and fellow-travellers. The Comintern expressed agreement with the fact that the agrarian problem should be put as a practical issue and that without peasant backing victory in the revolution was impossible. At the same time, the document emphasised that the immediate unleashing of a civil war in the countryside—at the height of war with imperialism and its agents in China—could weaken the Kuomintang's fighting capacity.

In October 1926 when this document was being compiled, the bourgeois-landowner leadership of the Kuomintang had not yet departed from revolution, and the united front was not yet in a state of decline. The NRA, in the meantime, was having difficulties. It had suffered heavy losses in the main direction of its thrust (Jiangxi Province); the commanding officers alone had lost no fewer than half their men. Incidentally, the NRA command had mainly come from the landowning class of the province where the battle was taking place. In those circumstances, the slogan of civil war in the countryside—especially at a time of serious problems in the military situation—could have splintered the NRA. Basing itself on the specific conditions of autumn 1926 the Comintern was bound to regard that slogan as premature and dangerous.

After the Seventh ECCI Plenum, whose decisions had taken account of the trend towards a disruption of the united front noticeable in Chiang's policy, Comintern recommendations took on a new aspect. For example, the document adopted in March 1927 spoke of the need to arm the workers and peasants (it had in mind both legal and illegal arming of worker-peasant detachments).

At that time when the Communist Party of China leadership was restrained in regard to the peasant movement, the ECCI sent a number of recommendations to the Communist Party on all possible developments in the peasants' revolutionary activity with reliance on those military units which had been



formed from "revolutionary peasants and workers". The Comintern sent the first such recommendations to the Communist Party in early May. By that time the inevitability of the Wuhan group coming out against the Party was already obvious—in view of the common class and military-caste interests of Chiang Kaishek and leading elements of the group. Bearing in mind the April experience when the expected blow was terrorist, the Comintern oriented the Party on being prepared to do battle with the enemy. To those ends the ECCI also thought it necessary for the Party even more to intensify the mass peasant movement which was so strongly active in Wuhan Province, to organise and arm worker-peasant detachments (as well as advise them to act in contact with individual leaders of the Wuhan group so as to preserve the banner of the "revolutionary" Kuomintang, so important for the people).

The Comintern documents of the time (May-June 1927) underline the need for a systematic launching of agrarian revolution under the slogan "All Power to the Peasant Associations and Committees in the Countryside", the need for advancing the slogan of confiscating landowners' lands in those provinces where the agrarian movement was widespread and where the reactionary army command had focused efforts on putting it down (in particular, in Hunan and Guangdong). It was important, the documents stated, actually for the peasants to confiscate land with the active participation of the Communist Party. The Comintern recommended the seizure of land "from below". Without an agrarian revolution, Comintern recommendations noted, the Kuomintang would become a plaything in the hands of the generals. Some leaders of the left (Wuhan) Kuomintang were afraid, wavered, collaborated, so the Comintern advised involving as many worker and peasant leaders in the top bodies up the Wuhan Kuomintang as possible. It stressed that the Party should remove the Wuhan Kuomintang dependence on the army command, mobilising Communists, revolutionary workers and peasants from Hunan and Hubei, forming several new corps from them and organising a revolutionary army before it was too late. It assessed any delay in the agrarian revolution as inadmissible.

It is perfectly clear, therefore, that the Trotskyite claim, freely echoed by bourgeois and reformist historiography, that the Comintern "impeded" the agrarian revolution in China is utterly fraudulent. On the contrary, the Comintern stood for developing the peasant movement and recommended the Communist Party of China to take account in its activity of the

real situation in the country that had taken shape after the 1927 coup.

The fact that Chiang Kaishek succeeded in engineering the coup in Shanghai is due not to the Comintern's "delay" in recommending the promotion of agrarian revolution, but to the Communist Party of China being *weaker* than the Kuomintang and its armed forces. It is for that reason that the Party suffered the setback in Wuhan as well. The Comintern's recommendation to launch a civil war in the countryside was made at the right moment, when in the areas controlled by the Wuhan group a popular movement had begun to gain scope against the rich peasants, when the clash with the local military command, eager to join up with Chiang Kaishek, became inevitable, when it was clear that the military command was intending to deal a crushing blow, when as a result of the Chiang Kaishek coup the united front lost any real political basis and actually ceased to exist.

The bloc of the Wuhan group and the Communist Party was the only local vestige of the former united front (establishment of military dictatorship deprived the Wuhan group of any political significance).

Conclusions on a transition of the revolution after the Shanghai coup to a new, higher stage and on class antagonism between the Chiang group and the Wuhan government, of course, were groundless.

In fact, right from early May 1927, the Comintern oriented Party leadership on raising up the people against leaders of the Wuhan Kuomintang ready for collusion with reactionary militarists. It was a question of whether the Party, after the blow inflicted by Chiang in April, should turn down a fresh clash or, on the contrary, should use the fact that the situation in areas controlled by the Wuhan government still gave the Party some freedom of action, and try to gather remaining forces for a fresh unavoidable confrontation. The Comintern chose the second course. Without any illusion about the Wuhan group, it advised the Party to take actions which were actually a preparation for a clash with it.

The ECCI at its Ninth Plenum (9-25 February 1928) examined the situation in China after the defeat of revolutionary forces in 1927. It noted in particular that "the first wave of the broad revolutionary movement of workers and peasants ... is over... At the present time, there is no mighty upsurge of the revolutionary mass movement on a national scale." Neither economic, nor class, nor national tasks of the bourgeois-democrat-



ic revolution had been resolved; it was wrong to think that the revolution in China had already grown into a socialist revolution. "The tendency of skipping over the bourgeois democratic phase of the revolution coupled with the simultaneous appraisal of the revolution as a 'permanent' revolution, is a mistake... That mistake is particularly harmful, as such formulation of the question is excluded also by the profound national peculiarity of the Chinese revolution as a semi-colonial revolution."<sup>1</sup>

Because of the regrouping of classes, the Plenum noted, a consolidation of reactionary forces had taken place in China: the bourgeoisie had not only utterly allied itself with the counter-revolutionary feudals and militarists, but it had actually concluded an agreement with foreign imperialism.

The Plenum also noted that the revolutionary movement in China was developing with extreme unevenness. "The present moment, by the way, is characteristic of the fact that whereas in some provinces the peasant movement develops further, in some industrial centres, the labour movement is bled white and subjected to unexampled white terror and is experiencing a certain degree of depression."<sup>2</sup> Thus, already in early 1928 the Comintern was stressing the exceptional important peculiarity of revolution in China which was to do much to define its development in the years to come.

The Comintern saw the principal objective of Chinese Communists in that period as drawing the mass of workers and peasants into the struggle, in enlightening them politically, in organising them around the Party and its slogans, in guiding their everyday actions. The Plenum decision spoke of the need for the Party to work in Kuomintang trade unions; it saw the main task of the Party in "Sovietised peasant districts" as carrying through an agrarian revolution and organising units of the Red Army for the purpose of their subsequent unification into a single all-China Red Army.

The Canton insurrection of December 1927 was described by the Comintern Executive as "a heroic attempt of the proletariat to organise a Soviet Government in China".<sup>3</sup> At the same time; it remarked that the insurrection demonstrated the inadequacy of preparatory work among workers, peasants and soldiers, an incorrect approach to the workers belonging to the Kuomintang

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 8, No. 16, 1928, p. 321.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

trade unions, and that the all-China Communist Party centre was poorly informed of the events in Canton. "Despite all these blunders, the Canton insurrection must be considered an example of greatest heroism of the Chinese workers, who have now the right to claim their historical role as leaders of the great Chinese revolution." The Comintern warned Chinese Communists of "the danger of putschism", of playing "with insurrection".<sup>1</sup>

It recommended the CPC to advance slogans demanding the confiscation of landowners' lands, introduction of the eight-hour working day, national unification of China and freedom from imperialism, the overthrow of the incumbent government, establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, and the organisation of councils (Soviets). The Comintern was supporting the slogan of Soviets as agencies of revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants in a changed situation that had taken shape as a result of the perfidy of the Kuomintang leaders, the defeat of the 1925-1927 revolution and the absence of conditions for establishing a broad anti-imperialist national front.

As before, the Comintern worked out its tactics in relation to China in the post-revolutionary period being well enough informed about the real balance of class-political forces in the country and the state of affairs within the Communist Party. From communications and letters received from China the Comintern knew about the dire situation in which the Party found itself. According to official data of the Labour Ministry, by May 1928 some 10,000 worker activists had been murdered. In many provinces the local Party committees had been completely wiped out. Those detained were tortured viciously or led about the streets and forced to point out Communists or worker activists.

The main mass of workers lived in a state of political depression caused by the events of the spring and summer of 1927, as well as by the unbridled terror. The working class had acted in the vanguard of revolution; that is why it had to bear the brunt of the onslaught. Workers lost many of their revolutionary political leaders; they were deprived of the right to take part in any trade union movement, save that led by the Kuomintang; they were brought under military-political control; provocateurs were insinuated into their illegal organisations and associations. The Comintern Executive realised that mass action by workers was out of the question in the new situation.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.



Terror could not be so total in rural areas, and it was there that the first waves of future revolution began to well up.

The Comintern Executive increasingly came round to the view that struggle by the Party for power throughout the country in the prevailing circumstances was utterly futile, and that the Party ought first to win a springboard—an area that it could hold under its control. During the years of revolution the actions of urban workers had stirred the peasant movement. And now, after the defeat of the revolution, there were still several “troubled areas” in the vast Chinese countryside. The peasants had not forgotten that it had been the Communists more than anyone else who has defended their interests. Wide sections of the peasants, insofar as they were informed of the communist movement, accepted it as a movement opposed to landowners’ dominance, in favour of peasant power and of organising independent peasant armed forces.

The Comintern Executive tirelessly oriented the Party leadership on re-establishing and strengthening the proletarian nucleus of the Party. But the task turned out to be unachievable. The reason lay not simply in the savage anti-worker terror campaign and not simply in the reformist worker legislation of the Kuomintang.

Non-proletarian elements put enormous pressure on the Party. Historical experience has shown that re-education of the non-proletarian masses in the spirit of genuine Marxism-Leninism is an exceedingly complex and responsible task whose resolution is possible only by an ideologically tempered and politically experienced vanguard of the working class.

The Comintern insistently recommended Chinese Communists to see that the Party was led by proletarian revolutionaries; it oriented the Party on setting up a worker-peasant Red Army. Yet more and more leaders of lumpen sections of the peasants and officers from militarist detachments, scattered during revolutionary years, were coming into the Party leadership. Naturally, they did not have experience of proletarian struggle and had no intention to learn from it. The historic responsibility for the Party’s internal change lay with its “new leadership” which not only did not stop the slide towards petty-bourgeois ideology, but itself came to be its vehicle and disseminator.

The Comintern condemned the leftist deviation of Li Li-san who, together with Mao Zedong, was trying to incite an armed conflict between Japan and the USSR so as to turn it into a world war; only decisive intervention of the Comintern forced

them to give up these intentions and saved the Communist Party of China from being wiped out (Li Li-san and Mao Zedong had planned in 1930 to carry out reckless actions in several major cities with the aim of seizing power in the country); the Comintern firm line obliged the Maoist leadership of the Party to favour the establishment of an anti-imperialist front; thanks to the Comintern, the Communist Party of China was able to strengthen its positions; the Comintern was taking measures to prevent the Communist Party of China from being diluted by petty-bourgeois and exploiter elements.

#### 6. COMINTERN AND SOME QUESTIONS OF THE COMMUNIST AND NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT IN THE ARAB EAST AND AFRICA

Practically all the oppressed countries of Asia and Africa in which liberation movements developed during the 1920s and 1930s came within the purview of the Comintern. The scope and forms of these movements, the composition of their participants differed. They all, however, had an anti-colonial bias; the Comintern regarded them as important factor of the world anti-imperialist struggle.

In working out recommendations for Communists and national-revolutionary forces of a particular country and region, the Comintern relied on fundamental Leninist tactical and strategic principles and took full account of local conditions. “Diversity in unity” and “unity in diversity” were typical of Comintern policy. Confirmation of that are the theoretical conclusions of the Comintern in regard to the revolutionary process in such varying parts of the oppressed world as the Arab East, South Africa and Tropical Africa.

The anti-imperialist movement in the Arab countries considerably came to life in the first half of the 1930s. Spontaneous uprisings of the lower stations of society took place in Egypt in the period 1930-1931, aimed mainly against the British oppressors; in the mid-1930s the strike movement also acquires wide scope there. Forces opposing British rule consolidated themselves in Iraq. The democratic party, named Neo-Destour, advocating national independence and better conditions for the peasants, came into existence in Tunisia in the early 1930s. In Algeria the demand for independence was advanced by the North African Star national liberation organisation; and the Popular Front formed in France in 1935 had its organisations



here among Europeans and Algerians alike. These organisations fought against local fascists and opposed Italian aggression in Ethiopia. The anti-imperialist struggle came to life in Syria in the mid-1930s in which workers, peasants, students, petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie all acted in a united front. A general strike of workers supported by peasant actions shook Damascus in January-March 1936.

In connection with the stepping up of the anti-imperialist struggle in Arab countries, the Comintern paid more attention to the development of the communist movement in the Arab East. The Executive Committee Secretariat under the chairmanship of Georgi Dimitrov gave careful and comprehensive consideration of the question on 29 February 1936.

The most important document adopted by the Secretariat as a result of the discussion was the detailed resolution "Tasks of Communist Parties of Arab Countries in the Fight for a Popular Anti-Imperialist Front".

The ECCI Secretariat noted that despite the growth in the national liberation and labour movement in Arab countries, the communist parties of those countries for a long time remained isolated groups divorced from the masses. That was due, the document said, above all to the fact that in their tactics the communist parties were "extremely sectarian" and "standing aloof from the Arab national liberation movement". The Comintern drew their attention to the need unswervingly to follow Lenin's propositions on backing the national liberation movement and national-revolutionary in particular. "The people have not seen in our parties organisations fighting above all for the national independence of Arab peoples," said the Comintern Executive's resolution. "They have regarded them as organisations striving for remote goals related to socialist revolution and expressed in abstract slogans which the people cannot understand. Our parties have tried to impose communist slogans on national-revolutionaries and, sharply attacking national-reformists, denying their influence among the people, precluding the possibility of joint action with them against the onslaught of imperialism have lumped them all together with the imperialists." The communist parties underestimated work among Arab working people. Only in Syria did Communists pursue a policy of "Arabisation" (i.e., winning the support of the mass of Arab working people) of the communist movement, took certain positions in the trade union and strike movement and played an active part in the popular struggle for national liberation.

"Communist parties of Arab countries," the resolution went

on to say, "must appreciate that the campaign against imperialist tyranny and for national independence is the dominant question in the whole of their activity and an indicator of their political standing in the country, and that the fate of the communist parties in Arab countries and the strengthening of their positions among the Arab working class depend on a proper approach to that question and activity in the struggle for national independence. Communists in the Arab countries must profoundly comprehend that they are responsible for the destiny of their people and their country, that they have a responsibility for the successful or unsuccessful outcome of the contention for national independence and social emancipation, that they are the inheritors and protectors of the best national and cultural traditions of their people."

The resolution also listed partial demands which parties were recommended to support: elementary political rights and freedoms, establishment of self-governing bodies, national schools, abolition of extraordinary laws for Arabs. The Comintern Executive counselled the parties vigorously to fight to draw the peasants into the national liberation movement.

The communist parties "must create all the conditions for organising an Arab popular front in each country. To do this they must radically change their attitude to national-revolutionary organisations and parties and their tactics and approach to national-reformists. Communists of Arab countries need to ensure close cooperation with national-revolutionaries and joint action with national-reformist organisations, to support demands of those organisations directed against imperialism, to penetrate those organisations and encourage movements for a popular anti-imperialist front within their ranks. Simultaneously they need to promote an ideological campaign against national-reformism as an ideology and practice of collaboration with imperialism, and a campaign against any manifestation of opportunist distortion of the popular-front tactics in the sense of collusion and conciliation with imperialism".

Referring to the resolution of its Seventh Congress on the report read by Georgi Dimitrov, the Comintern Executive advised Arab Communists to work within the existing reformist labour unions and to encourage their conversion into class organisations. Comintern recommendations orienting them on the anti-war struggle were of great importance to Arab Communists. The resolution noted that by opposing imperialist actions in converting Arab countries into their military strategic bases, into sources of cannon fodder, and consigning Arab peoples to starvation



and deprivation, the communist parties could and had to mobilise the widest united front against the imperialist war. At the same time, they had to mobilise the Arab peoples to back the struggle of the Abyssinian people for their independence against Italian fascist aggression.

The resolution contained recommendations for individual Arab countries as well. So, Syrian Communists were recommended to campaign for concerted action of all forces and parties opposed to imperialism, and to organise a broad non-partisan movement in the form of a far-flung network of organisations giving voice to the urgent demands of various sections of the working people. In Palestine the Communist Party was advised to conduct work also among Jewish working people as well as among the Arab population. The Comintern Executive saw the major objective in Iraq as setting up a mass national-revolutionary movement, uniting national-revolutionary elements into a mass legal party with a broad democratic programme. In the opinion of the Executive, the most salient condition for the Communist Party's successful work in Egypt was to have a correct, realistic policy in relation to the Wafd, the party led by the national bourgeoisie. The Wafd was very broad in its makeup and was "the most powerful national party in the country with an enormous impact on the people"; Communists were recommended to support the Wafd's anti-imperialist demands and be vigilant about attempts by leaders of the Wafd to compromise with imperialism at the expense of Egyptian people's interests.

French Communists were advised to follow the resolute line of Arabising the communist movement in Algeria and Tunisia. As the resolution put it, "French comrades must remember Lenin's words addressed to Russian Communists of the Transcaucasus, that they were helpmates, not leaders or nannies". The Comintern Executive felt that Algerian Communists should join the North African Star national-revolutionary organisation, which had "undisputed influence among the Arab people" and to unite the people around the slogans of that organisation. Through the North African Star the Communist Party was to work on establishing committees of a united Arab popular front embracing such Arab national parties as the Ulem Association, the Federation of Elected Muslims, League of Arab Schoolteachers, all student associations, etc.

In Tunisia, said the resolution of the ECCI Secretariat, Arab national personnel of the Communist Party should join the existing mass revolutionary national party Neo-Destour to work within it. Tunisian Communists were advised to encourage the

building of organisations of that party in town and country, actively to support left-wing elements in the organisation's leadership, mobilise the people on the basis of its slogans. By concentrating their activity within the Destour, Communists should at the same time retain the independence of their organisation, shoring up and extending their ranks, so that their prestige increased among Arab working people. The Comintern Executive stressed that attempts by Tunisian Communists to impose leftist slogans upon the national party, for understanding which the people following it were not yet ready, could only lead to strengthening the right and isolating left Destourists and Communists from the people.

The ECCI Secretariat adopted yet another resolution—"On Ties and Interrelations Between Communist Parties of Arab Countries". In the Secretariat's opinion, ethnic kinship, the common language and the solidarity of Arab peoples in the struggle against imperialism and for national independence presented communist parties in the area with the task of ensuring well-organised contacts for the purpose of mutual information, exchange of experience, mutual assistance, concerted campaigns, issuing of appeals and cooperation in publishing political literature and periodicals.

Speaking at a Secretariat meeting, Dimitrov stressed the importance of firm links between communist parties of Arab countries, but did not approve the idea of forming a united general Arab party organisation and spoke against premature advancement of the slogan of establishing a united Arab republic, against taking the tendency of Arab peoples towards unity for already established unity. He thought that this idea was mere wishful thinking. Dimitrov was supported by Eastern Secretariat leader Otto Kuusinen and by D. Z. Manuilsky.

Comintern documents referring to the liberation movement of Arab peoples were based on Lenin's idea of the need for every possible support by Communists to national-revolutionary movements in the East while retaining the independence of the communist movement. Another important thought—in relation to Arabisation of the communist movement—was most closely bound up with Lenin's notion of Communists working among the people. The Comintern Executive Committee Secretariat thought that a prerequisite of Arabisation was the communist parties' struggle for political rights for Arabs, for drawing them into the political liberation movement.

On 17 March 1936 the ECCI Secretariat discussed the question of the work of the Communist Party of South Africa and



basically approved its draft programme of action. The final text of the action programme "Tasks of Communist of South Africa" noted the "profound discontent" of the native peoples of South Africa. The programme was patently internationalist. Only the common struggle of all exploited, oppressed working people was capable of improving the unbearable position of the peoples of South Africa, the programme said. It called for unity of native peoples, of all workers without distinction by race and all White working people for a common struggle against imperialism. The document focused attention of South African Communists on everyday, urgent demands of the working people.

The first part of the programme was entitled "Bread and Work for All Workers, White and Coloured!". In particular it put forward demands of equal pay for equal work, without favour to race or sex, without reducing the existing level of wages of Whites; higher wages in line with depreciation of the pound; the right of the local population to obtain skilled work; the payment of unemployment benefit to all the unemployed. The second part contained slogans reflecting the demands of peasants and farm labourers. "Only confiscation without compensation of the land of the big land barons, ... the religious missions and crown possessions, and the transfer of that land together with state land to the free use of native peoples and poor White farmers could lead to a *fundamental and lasting* improvement in the position of the native population," the programme stated. At the same time, immediate demands were made: annulling the land law that infringed the interests of the local populace; immediately setting aside a special land fund from state, crown and big landowner lands for granting Africans a land area sufficient for "ensuring life"; during crisis and unemployment the free granting of bread by the state to starving farmers—both White and African; the return of all subsidies received by big farmers from the state; state aid to all poor farmers out of the profits of the finance magnates and landowners; state-provided irrigation facilities to poor and middle farmers.

The Comintern and the Communist Party of South Africa felt that "the very rich should pay". South African Communists demanded progressive taxation of the profits of the finance magnates, the big bourgeoisie and landowners; the annulling of crippling taxes imposed upon the local working people (passport taxes, poll taxes, tax on habitation, etc.); a fundamental change in tariffs policy by the government in the interests of working people.

The part of the document "Rights and Liberties for All!" was also extremely important. Communists demanded "Equal civil and political rights and liberties for all the adult population of South Africa without favour to race, nationality, sex, colour of skin and social status!". They also advanced the slogans: "Against the abolition of those modest political rights that some native peoples possess, and for the extension of those rights"; for the annulling of the "anti-native electoral law", the passport law and all similar constrictions; for freedom of movement; for freedom of residence for Africans and Whites; for the extension to Africans of existing liberties in establishing associations—trade union, cooperative, political, for granting freedom of the press, assembly, demonstrations and strikes. They demanded the urgent disbandment of fascist organisations whipping up national and racial hatred in the interests of capitalists and landowners. The campaign for equal political rights and liberties for natives, like the campaign for improving working and living conditions, for a higher cultural level, was assessed as the most powerful means of defending living conditions, wages, the rights and freedoms of White working people.

The document clearly spelled out the tasks of Communists in South Africa. The main one was to campaign for a united anti-imperialist popular front. The Communist Party was not only to support the liberation movement of African peoples, the strike movement of workers, the "movement of poor Whites" and the Boer republican movement, it was also to campaign for closer contact and agreement with existing mass organisations, and in particular with the reformist African National Congress "on the subject of organising joint action". It especially emphasised the task of uniting the entire South African proletariat.

The programme underlined that the slogan of an independent native republic advanced by the Sixth Comintern Congress was only a long-term objective of the national liberation struggle in South Africa, summing up all the specific economic and political slogans of the people. What sort of state organisation the peoples of South Africa would choose would depend on the specific internal and international conditions.

The Comintern ratified the draft "Programme of Action of the Popular League for Liberation of the Congo (PLLC)" on 27 April 1932. The programme stated that the PLLC was an organisation of Congolese revolutionary workers and peasants; it was leading workers and peasants in a fight against starvation, low wages, onerous labour, and full and complete indepen-



dence of the Congo. The programme called upon the Congolese people to support the struggle begun by workers on the plantations in Kwango and peasants in the villages who were rising against the Belgian colonialists, and to come to their assistance, to organise themselves, to refuse to load and transport weapons and troops: "Not a single boat, not a single train bearing death to freedom-fighters must leave the towns."

The PLLC programme proclaimed slogans of freedom of assembly, speech and organisation, the right to move from village to village and from province to province, free access to work and freedom to leave it. It also advanced demands to confiscate all lands and forests seized from the Congolese people, railways, mills, mines, plantations and for "their return to the people of the Congo". The programme contained a special appeal to the Congolese workers, saying that capitalist companies had been forcing Congolese workers to labour in stifling heat for many long hours, were keeping them on starvation rations and, besides, were feeding them rotten food. It was Congolese workers—because they were strong, because there were hundreds and thousands of them working in big centres, because they were fighting every day against oppression—that had to head the struggle of the Congolese people. Workers in the Congo were recommended to unite in trade unions. The Congolese people were not alone in their struggle, the programme said. Throughout the African continent, in India and China, in Germany, France and Belgium, across the world, millions of working people—"black, white, brown and yellow"—"joined in fraternal union, were waging the war of the poor against the rich, of workers against bosses, of the oppressed against the oppressors".

At the height of class battles within Europe, at a time when the most complex tasks associated with the mounting revolutionary movement in Asia were being decided, the Comintern was paying utmost attention, too, to the struggle of peoples of Africa, fully assessing its prospects and significance, and helping to form national-revolutionary organisations there.

## CHAPTER 3

### COMINTERN CONGRESSES: FURTHER ELABORATION OF CARDINAL PROBLEMS OF EASTERN POLICY

Many traits inherent in the entire activity of the Third International were typical of the relations of the Comintern with communist parties in the colonies and semi-colonies.

In all circumstances the Comintern felt it necessary to unite communist groups so that at a certain stage they could form parties, relying primarily on workers and led by a proletarian nucleus. The idea of a working-class party which was to work "wherever the masses are to be found", to campaign for leadership of the liberation movement and to combine Marxism-Leninism with the struggle of the oppressed was invariably put in the forefront.

The Comintern did a great deal of work in affirming the main, determining, universally important Marxist-Leninist principles among communist parties of the East; if they followed those principles they would achieve victory, if they underestimated them they would lose. Of course, it always took account of the specific conditions of each country.

In its recommendations and advice to communist parties of the East the Comintern tried to take universal account of both the views and the level of political awareness of a particular party and its leaders, as well as the viewpoint of Communists from other sections. Decisions of the Executive Committee of the Communist International were the result of studying the experience of struggle and the practical application of conclusions of Marxist-Leninist theory to the specific conditions of a particular country. Comintern decisions contained such proposals as, for example, creation of a working-class party, communist parties' alliance in anti-imperialist struggle with non-proletarian forces whose economic and other



interests clashed with those of the imperialist bourgeoisie, and work within national-revolutionary organisations. The Comintern was guided by experienced figures of the international communist movement, who had a thorough knowledge of revolutionary theory and practice. As far as the young communist leaders in the East were concerned, they were only just setting out on the road of revolutionary struggle under the banner of Marxism-Leninism and, naturally, needed support and, if need be, correction too. At the same time, the Comintern listened most attentively to the opinion of Eastern Communists, who took an active part in drawing up collective decisions.

The advice and recommendations of the Comintern, not to speak of its theoretical and propagandist importance, were of real practical benefit to communist parties and all fighters against imperialism. The ECCI was sometimes thousands of miles distant from revolutionary events; liaison was most difficult to establish; its advice was not always immediately understood or acted upon; but in that most difficult situation, Comintern decisions exerted a powerful influence on the outcome of the communist and national liberation movement. Thus, Comintern recommendations to the Communist Party of China on a united front with the revolutionary Kuomintang, while invariably safeguarding the Party's independence, directly encouraged the development of the mass base of the Chinese revolution, its extension and deepening, the success of the Northern Campaign; Comintern advice in 1930 saved the Communist Party of China from being wiped out; the recommendations given to the Communist Party of India to pursue a united front policy did much to help launch a mass movement within the country; Comintern resolutions helped the Communist Party of the Philippines to reorient itself politically, as a result of which the Party became the centre of a strong worker and peasant movement. And so one could continue.

The Comintern was constantly in command of events taking place within the national liberation movements of the Eastern countries. On one and the same day the ECCI Eastern Secretariat and Presidium received communications from freedom-fighting Communists about the eviction of poor tenant farmers on Luzon Island in the Philippines, about barbarities of the French imperialists in Indochina, about the policy of the Indonesian nationalists, and about the situation in Soviet areas of China. It had to sort it all out and give urgent recommendations, since communist parties were expecting them. They constantly turned to the Comintern for help of every kind. In addition,

many Communists in the East thought the Comintern was "omnipotent".

The Comintern fully appreciated that though the proletariat formed the core of the young Eastern communist parties, they also recruited their members elsewhere: from left groups of the patriotic movement, trade unions linked with that movement, as well as from intellectual circles advocating liberationist ideas (of the most diverse trends initially) and having contact with workers. As a rule, there was a combination and interaction of those three sources of communist party membership. But in Vietnam the first was undoubtedly the most important, in the Philippines—the second, and in China—the third. There were also sources of a different nature. In Indonesia, for example, the initial core of the communist movement came from Dutch Tribunists (a revolutionary wing of Dutch social-democracy) who had left their homeland.

If we talk of the ways in which Eastern communist parties emerged ideologically and politically, we see a single common and determining trait, despite all the specific conditions of individual colonies and semi-colonies: the communist movement in each of them arose as a "local result" of the universal historical process, begun after the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, of combining Marxism-Leninism with the liberation (in the widest sense of the word) movement of peoples in the oppressed countries. This process was protracted and could not be otherwise (indeed, it is still continuing today); the Comintern's activity exerted a huge beneficial influence on that process.

When defining its policy towards the revolutionary movement in the East, the Comintern insisted on a Marxist-Leninist position in the continued and decisive struggle with the opposition whose leader Trotsky had become. That was the case when Trotsky still played a certain part in the Comintern, and when, later, he had become a renegade and had been turned out of it. A clear appreciation of the principal differences between Lenin's teaching on revolution, on the one hand, and Trotsky's "permanent revolution" notion, on the other, played an exceedingly important part in the Comintern fight to work out a revolutionary and, at the same time, a realistic policy in the East.

The Comintern believed that in their political activity Communists should be guided not only by those objective popular interests which could be satisfied solely by attaining the ultimate goal of the communist movement and which the people had



yet to comprehend, but also by those interests on behalf of which they were entering the movement in the current specific stage of the revolutionary process. This strategic principle fully accords with the tasks of attaining the ultimate goal. It is precisely for the ultimate goal—on behalf of a socialist reconstruction of society—that Communists strive for the complete fulfilment of presocialist stages of revolution. The more consistently Communists and their allies fight, for example, for the victory of national, anti-imperialist revolution, the nearer becomes the task of a socialist reconstruction of society. Only a vigorous vanguard action by Communists at all stages of the revolutionary process, particularly at its democratic stage, can create the requisite conditions for uniting forces of socialist revolution.

Such a policy, however, can in no way be accompanied by the imposition of a socialist task on the still non-socialist movement. That would encourage not the success of the movement, but its defeat, not the unbroken process of revolution, but its interruption, not the extension of communist influence, but isolation, which would deal a blow both to Communists and to the revolutionary movement as a whole.

That idea which guided the Comintern and which it developed in its theoretical and practical activity is of everlasting importance. Here is a single, but very typical example. Communists representing the interests of the working class in present circumstances are actively advocating support of changes being implemented under non-proletarian revolutionary leadership in those countries which are developing along a non-capitalist road, since those changes encourage the successful completion of the national-democratic stage of revolution. All working people, not Communists alone, are interested in completing it successfully; far-reaching agrarian reforms, removal of vestiges of feudalism, construction of a national economy, liberation from imperialist exploitation, social and cultural reforms, etc., are of vast benefit to the working people, including Communists. They always remember their ultimate goal—the building of a communist society and therefore act as the most resolute and consistent fighters for the victory of presocialist stages of revolution.

Lenin's propositions put before the Second Comintern Congress in July-August 1920 constituted the foundation of Comintern policy in the East. Any departure by a communist party from the dialectical combination of revolutionary spirit and realism invariably caused a decline in its influence with

the people, isolation and defeat. And conversely, unswerving adherence to these ideas, substantiated by Marxist-Leninist science and confirmed by revolutionary practice, invariably produced beneficial results.

Comintern policy changed with the development of objective conditions of revolutionary struggle; those changes were not only specific, referring to a particular country or region, but also general and universal. Comintern policy in relation to Eastern countries was not defined exclusively by the situation in that area of the world. The major directions and principles of strategy and tactics were based on an assessment of the world situation and in particular on the state of the world revolutionary process.

The national-colonial question occupied a prominent place in the work of the Fifth Comintern Congress in June-July 1924. D. Z. Manuilsky spoke on the question at a plenary session of the Congress. He stressed that events that had taken place since the Second Congress had confirmed the veracity of its "fundamental lines" on the national question. In justifying this thesis, the speaker indicated a "very rapid growth of the national and revolutionary movements in all colonial countries".<sup>1</sup> The posing of the national question at the Fifth Congress was explained, as the report showed, by three reasons: "...At the Second Congress ... we put forward for the first time the idea of the united revolutionary front between the proletariat and the oppressed nations and colonies."<sup>2</sup> Since that time a great deal of experience had been accumulated which had to be taken into account; in the business of practical implementation of a united front the young communist parties had made more than a few mistakes, and those had to be analysed; during the period which elapsed since the Second Congress an event of great political importance had taken place, "the establishment in Soviet Russia of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as an experiment of the solution of the national question under proletarian dictatorship in a peasant country comprising many nationalities".<sup>3</sup> Hence the need for new decisions which would take account of all these factors.

Specific experience brought Communists face to face with

<sup>1</sup> *Fifth Congress of the Communist International. Abridged Report of Meetings Held at Moscow June 17th to July 8th, 1924.* The Communist Party of Great Britain, London, 1924, pp. 186-87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.



fresh aspects of the national-colonial question. So, a tendency arose among wide sections of working people in several countries to set up worker-peasant parties with a relatively radical programme of struggle against imperialism. Manuilsky's report noted that the Comintern had proposed that the Communists in Java "take an active part in the work of the local workers'-peasants' parties there", while the Communists in China join the Kuomintang which would push that party to more decisive struggle against imperialism. Manuilsky indicated the danger for communist parties of nihilistically "ignoring the phenomena which are revolutionising the East", and "of losing their proletarian character by collaboration with the petty-bourgeoisie".<sup>1</sup>

M. N. Roy sharply criticised the views of the Comintern that adhered to the positions of the Second Congress. He particularly objected to the resolution of the Fifth Congress on the ECCI Report, stressing the need for a direct link between the Comintern and the national liberation movement in the East so as to draw the colonial peoples into an alliance with the revolutionary proletariat (the gist of Roy's amendment to the Congress resolution was that the national bourgeoisie was refusing to oppose imperialist and hence "the anti-imperialist struggle from now on can only be successfully waged under the leadership of a working-class party"; the amendment was rejected by the appropriate commission of the Congress). Roy's speech was essentially a masked attack on Lenin's propositions on the national-colonial question confirmed by the Second Comintern Congress. In many cases Roy justified his assertions that practically ran counter to that Congress's decisions by the fact that the situation in the East between 1920 and 1924 had, he said, radically altered. Proclaiming his loyalty to the Second Congress decisions, Roy was essentially trying to restrict their application in time (reckoned to be short-term) and space (suitable only for the most backward of the colonies and semi-colonies).

In opposing "further direct development of the direct contact of the Executive with the national movements of emancipation", asserting that the "petty bourgeoisie ... are separated from the masses"<sup>2</sup> and that it was the direct objective of communist parties in the East to occupy the "vacant" post of leader, that class contradictions in the colonies already pre-

vailed over national contradictions, Roy said nothing about the fact that in 1920 Lenin had crossed out identical assertions from the initial version of his theses.

Roy's assertions to delegates of the Fifth Congress represented a set of views which the Comintern, as well as Lenin, had rejected in 1920; its kernel was the thesis, renouncing an alliance with the bourgeois-democratic anti-imperialist movement.

The Fifth Congress, which also rebuffed this set of views, showed that the national liberation movement in the colonies led by non-proletarian sections was on the upsurge on a world scale. In this connection, the Congress underlined once again that the exceptionally important, fundamental significance of Lenin's propositions on the national-colonial question came from the fact that they were meant not for a short span of time, but for a historically long period, during which the national movement in the oppressed countries objectively retained considerable anti-imperialist potential. Those ideas provided the overall direction of communist strategy and tactics in regard to the whole national liberation stream of world anti-imperialist movement.

Lenin regarded as of cardinal importance the question of revolutionary anti-imperialist potential of the national liberation movements, and *in that respect* the colonies and semi-colonies formed a "single type", being countries enslaved by imperialism and carrying therefore an anti-imperialist charge. Here Lenin, as we see from his "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions", as well as from his speeches at the Second Comintern Congress, did not mean that as a consequence of capitalist development in the colonies and semi-colonies the discontent of the people awakening to political life—even if that was directly caused by social tyranny—was no longer taking the form of general national anti-imperialist movements. In that connection we may recall that, when speaking of the need for an alliance with bourgeois democrats of the colonies, Lenin had in mind also such a comparatively developed country as India.

The Comintern Executive Committee prepared a draft congress resolution on national and Eastern questions which noted the correctness of Comintern orientation on an alliance of the proletarian movement and the national liberation movement. The authors of the draft were not influenced by those who presumed that the time was ripe for posing the question of proletarian hegemony in such countries as India, that the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 4, No. 50, 1924, pp. 518, 519.



victory of the proletariat over the collusive national bourgeoisie was a fundamental condition of their liberation from imperialism, that one should concentrate "all the blows" on that bourgeoisie. But to the extent that it was deemed expedient to continue discussions on Eastern issues at the following congress, the draft was not put to discussion.<sup>1</sup> In the "Theses on Tactics", however, the Congress indicated the need to "devote greater attention to this movement [the worker and communist movement in the East—A.R.], and at the same time give every support to the movement of all oppressed nationalities directed against imperialism, in the spirit of the resolutions of the Second World Congress".<sup>2</sup>

The propositions of the Fifth Congress for ideological-theoretical and organisational strengthening of sections in the Communist International were of immense importance for the international communist movement. Lenin had many times spoken of how important it was for fraternal parties to master the experience of Bolsheviks whose tactics could be used as a model, because they had the experience of three revolutions to their credit, had assimilated and developed all that was most valuable from the international revolutionary movement of the proletariat, had shown unswerving loyalty to the interests of the working class and staunch adherence to principle in defence of those interests, had come through, as Lenin put it, years of unheard-of trials and sacrifice, had shown unprecedented revolutionary heroism, incredible vigour and wholehearted devotion to searching, learning, testing in practice, trying out, comparing with experience in Europe.

Lenin constantly reminded his colleagues that they should never follow the Russian model thoughtlessly, mechanically; he thoroughly opposed any vulgar making an absolute out of Bolshevik experience, especially when attempts were made to use that experience to cover up dogmatism or an inability to apply Bolshevik science to a concrete situation.

It was from Lenin's positions that the Fifth Comintern Congress defined the main features of a genuinely communist party: it has to be really mass, maintain in both legal and illegal situations the most close and indissoluble contact with the mass of workers and serve to express their needs and

aspirations; the party should pursue tactics free of dogmatism and sectarianism; the party must be able to resort to all strategic manoeuvres against the enemy without losing, however, its identity; the party should essentially be revolutionary, Marxist, unswervingly advancing towards the set objective; the party should be a centralised organisation forbidding any factions or trends; the party should conduct persistent and regular work among the soldiers of bourgeois armies.

"Bolshevising the Party," stated the Fifth Comintern Congress in its "Theses on Tactics," "means the application to our sections what in Russian Bolshevism was and is international and of general application."<sup>1</sup> "The bolshevisation of the Communist Party is to be pursued," congress decisions said, "in exact accordance with the behests of Lenin, attention being paid, however, to the concrete circumstances in each country."<sup>2</sup>

Unity and steadfastness of the Comintern's political course on a worldwide scale was particularly evident when communist parties intensified work among the people and stepped up the struggle against right and left deviations, when the Comintern and its sections, learning from the experience of class battles, began to implement Lenin's idea of a united front.

The practice of struggle at the time required elaboration of specific propositions and recommendations bearing upon the tasks of communist parties in the East. In that connection the national-colonial question was again examined in detail by the Fifth Enlarged ECCI Plenum in March-April 1925. On 6 April the Plenum adopted resolutions in which it assessed the political situation in India, Indonesia, Egypt and the Philippines, and proposed recommendations on programme and tactical questions to Communists of those countries.

The ECCI stated that historically the national liberation movement was on the upsurge and had vast prospects. The fact that over the previous two or three years the movement had somewhat subsided in a number of Eastern countries should not be interpreted as evidence of its defeat; that idea was resolutely rejected. At the same time, the Executive noted that the task of direct armed struggle to establish a worker-peasant government in the Eastern countries was not being advanced at the given stage. From the Comintern's viewpoint, the relative maturity of the national bourgeoisie (India) or, conversely, its practical absence (Indonesia) by no means barred the way

<sup>1</sup> Many conclusions of the draft were inscribed in specific decisions relating to several Eastern countries at the following Comintern forum—the Fifth Plenum of the Enlarged ECCI, March-April 1925.

<sup>2</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 4, No. 62, p. 652.

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 4, No. 62, p. 653.

<sup>2</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 4, No. 52, p. 550.



to the struggle for national independence. In elaborating the most correct tactics the Comintern above all sought to know which class was at the head of the liberation struggle in a particular country. Its decisions were always dominated by the idea that the national movement carried an anti-imperialist charge of enormous power.

With complete conviction the Comintern felt that the oppressed people of the East, awakening to political life, would see the road to liberation primarily in struggle against imperialist rule and gradually—at a different rate in various countries—would be drawn into it; that national struggle would, depending on the specific circumstances—above all on the class nature of the leadership—be revolutionary or reformist, mass or involving mainly the leaders.

The Comintern oriented communist parties of the oppressed countries on strengthening their proletarian base, on safeguarding the independence of the proletarian movement, on defending the interests of the working class. At the same time, it pointed to the vast possibilities which were opening up before communist parties of the oppressed countries when they took part most energetically in the national liberation struggle; it underlined that this policy, on the one hand, would create prerequisites for converting the parties into leaders of the people in the future and, on the other, would give the national liberation movement scope and power, would revolutionise it, encourage the movement's leadership to shift towards more resolute anti-imperialist positions.

In developing the ideas of the Second Congress on the need for close ties between the struggle of the world proletariat and the movement of oppressed peoples, and on the consequent tasks of Eastern Communists, the Comintern advanced the slogan of forming "popular-revolutionary", "popular", and "worker-peasant" parties and reminded Communists of the East of the need for unflinching consistent work within those parties—while strictly retaining their own political independence. The objective must be not to make those "bloc" parties communist or to take them over—that would be unrealistic—but to turn them into political organisations of an anti-imperialist front.

ECCI decisions further developed Lenin's ideas and creatively summed up the practical experience of the Comintern and individual communist parties in the colonies and semi-colonies.

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern, August-September

1928, met in a difficult international situation. Imperialism was hatching a war against the Soviet Union. Right-wing leaders of social-democracy had taken up a conniving position in regard to those aggressive plans. The Labour and Socialist International at its Marseilles congress announced that "world Bolshevism" was the factor most threatening the cause of peace. At the same time, right-wing social-democratic leaders were doing all they could to counteract the Comintern policy of creating a united front against the onslaught of capital and against the colonial policy of plunder and were undermining the revolutionary actions of the workers, brandishing the sham slogan of class peace. Such then was the policy of right-wing leaders of social-democracy, the most influential intermediate political force in the advanced capitalist countries. As far as the intermediate forces in the East were concerned, there was the Chinese Kuomintang, for example, which had led the liberation struggle for several years, had now betrayed the revolution, was opposing the Communist Party of China and was functioning as a counter-revolutionary, anti-popular and pro-imperialist party. All that was bound to have an impact on the attitude of the international communist movement to social-democracy in the West and national-bourgeois sections in the East.

Meanwhile, the success of socialist construction in the USSR, the growth of organisation of the labour movement in capitalist countries and political activity of many colonial peoples, the aggravation of crisis phenomena within the system of world capitalism, the intensification of inter-imperialist contradictions—all created the grounds for ideas that the conditions were already ripe for a rapid acceleration of the revolutionary process and that capitalism was on the verge of complete collapse. At the end of 1927 the Comintern adopted the tactics which subsequently became known as "class against class", aimed at intensifying the struggle against the collusive policy of social-democratic leaders and strengthening the class awareness of the proletariat. At the same time the "class against class" tactics were based on the assumption that the intermediate sections between the working class and the bourgeoisie were politically bankrupt and that reformist organisations, social-democratic ones and the labour unions controlled by them, were entirely on the side of the bourgeoisie. Corresponding changes took place, too, in the Comintern's attitude towards national-bourgeois forces of the East.

The Sixth Congress adopted the Comintern programme, debated questions concerning measures of combating the danger of



imperialist wars, problems of the revolutionary movement in the colonies and semi-colonies, and several other issues.

The programme was an important political document. All countries in the world, excepting the USSR, were divided into three main types, depending on the conditions and ways of transition to proletarian dictatorship: highly developed capitalist states; medium-level capitalist states with still incomplete bourgeois-democratic changes; and colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries with some beginnings, or even a considerable level, of industrial development, with a preponderance of feudal-medieval relations, a concentration of major economic positions in the hands of the imperialists. In the third group of countries the central issue was to combat feudalism and precapitalist forms of exploitation, consistently to carry through the agrarian revolution of peasants, on the one hand, and to fight imperialism for national independence, on the other. In such countries transition to proletarian dictatorship was possible only through a number of preparatory stages, only as a result of a whole period of the growth of bourgeois-democratic revolution into socialist revolution, while successful socialist construction was only possible with support from countries where proletarian dictatorship had won. Even more backward countries were examined separately; they were those which had no or almost no hired labourers and where most of the population lived in tribal conditions. Here, the programme said, of key importance was the fight for national liberation: "Victorious national uprisings in these countries may open the way for their direct development towards socialism and their avoiding the stage of capitalism, provided real, powerful assistance is rendered to them by the countries in which the proletarian dictatorship is established."<sup>1</sup>

The programme reflected some assessments of social-democracy related to the "class against class" tactics. Within the context of those tactics it was often considered that the left wing of social-democracy presented the greatest danger. Bearing in mind the overall evaluation of the world situation to which the Comintern then adhered, one could say that this attitude to the left wing of social-democracy was logical. If the temporary stability of capitalism was actually at an end, then of course the greatest danger to the advancing revolution was to come from those social-democratic groups which, while

not favouring in reality an end to the capitalist system, could by their radical-within the system's bounds-policy carry the people along with them and therefore hinder the attainment of the seemingly near socialist goal. This attitude to left social-democracy stemmed, however, from an insufficiently realistic appreciation of the situation. As world economic crisis approached and developed, the attitude towards left social-democracy was becoming increasingly negative. That was the case until it became clear that hopes for a speedy socialist revolution in advanced capitalist countries had been futile.

The Comintern's attitude to intermediate forces in the East, in particular to the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist movement, altered primarily in the same direction. The change came ultimately from the same overall assessment of the world situation which determined corresponding changes in Comintern policy in regard to the West. If, as had been thought, capitalist countries were on the verge of socialist revolution, for it to be supported by people of the oppressed countries it was necessary to neutralise the influence of nationalist forces on the people, to "detach" them from the masses. In the opinion of the Comintern, at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, the left radical wing of non-proletarian forces of the national liberation movement—the petty-bourgeois democrats—posed particular danger; since, though not wishing or being unable to support communist party slogans aimed at an accelerated transition of the anti-imperialist revolutionary process to the next, socialist stage, they nonetheless enjoyed influence among the working people precisely as a consequence of their being radical. That was the overall logic of the delusion which was overcome by 1935. Getting rid of its consequences—they were at the centre of attention at the Seventh Comintern Congress—naturally required much more time.

The Comintern also underestimated traditions—social-democratic in the West, nationalist, caste and religious in the East. And that was not a matter of ignoring the specific conditions of the East. The Comintern noted in its documents the Orient's "own philosophy", "the legacy of foregoing cultures and civilisations" and "a special type of thinking owing to another history and another culture". Difficulties arose over the wish of some Communists to do away with those traditions, whose existence they recognised, at a stroke.

In the light of those changes which took place in Comintern tactics, we must examine also the course of discussion

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 8, No. 92, p. 1761.



of the question of the revolutionary movement in the colonial and semi-colonial countries at the Sixth Comintern Congress and the decisions adopted by it.

Otto Kuusinen, head of the ECCI Eastern Secretariat, read a report on the revolutionary movement in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

He focused attention on imperialist colonial policy, national-reformism, the lessons of defeat of the Chinese revolution. These issues were reflected in the draft thesis on "The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies". Much of the report was devoted to criticising the so-called decolonisation theory. Its proponents believed that British imperialism was now interested in industrialising India and that this circumstance was removing the basis for political differences between the Indian bourgeoisie and imperialism. They maintained that, as a result of the mounting incursion of British capital, feudal relations in the country were essentially being eliminated. Conclusions from that conception were, of course, extremely leftist; the need for and possibility of a united anti-colonial front with national-bourgeois groups were denied. Both the theory itself and the political conclusions from it encountered sharp objections and solid criticism from many delegates at the Congress.

Having shown that the policy of British imperialism in relation to India was principally the same as before, that the colonialists were continuing to hamper the country's industrialisation, Kuusinen drew the attention of delegates to the resolution of the Indian National Congress demanding complete national independence for the Indian people (it had been adopted in Madras in December 1927). "When I am told," said Kuusinen, "that this is only on paper, that the people are only making a noise, that they are only indulging in 'Moon-shine politics', I say: quite so, but even behind moonshine one can discover a hard fact, namely the moon itself."<sup>1</sup> The noise being made by the Indian bourgeoisie, Kuusinen noted, was symptomatic of the fact that something serious and important was maturing. He expressed the opinion that the policy of the Indian bourgeoisie at that time had a certain objective importance for promoting the mass movement. He reminded delegates of the influence which the Indian national-reformists enjoyed among the people. At the same time he pointed to the most important forces which

would bring India emancipation: the proletariat, the peasantry, petty-bourgeois intellectuals and the urban petty bourgeoisie. He said, "And if any of the Indian comrades have doubts as to the anti-industrialisation tendency of the British policy in India, I would like them to make up their minds on this question once and for all. It depends a great deal on this if the immediate task of the Communist Party in India is correctly understood, namely, the task of relieving, by Communist agitation, the mass of the Indian peasantry and the proletariat of the illusion that the policy of British imperialism can make the decolonisation of India a reality, or can even bring it nearer. This will of course not be the case."<sup>1</sup>

In regard to China, Kuusinen noted that the draft resolution (i.e., theses) on the question "whether adherence of Communists to the Kuomintang was correct or not" answered in the affirmative.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, he said: "But it is perfectly clear to us now that the inevitability of the disruption of this bloc was not soon enough realised by the Communists."<sup>3</sup> He drew delegates' attention to the rapid process of "peasantisation" of the Communist Party of China. The fact that 80 per cent of its members were peasants showed that the Party had what he called an "abnormal" composition. All the same he did not suggest barring Chinese peasants from joining the Party; he focused attention on another aspect of the question, emphasising that the CPC "must certainly work very hard so as to prepare and train for itself cadres drawn from the working class". That was the crux of the matter.

Reflecting the viewpoint of the Comintern Executive Committee, Kuusinen expressed the following thought in his report: at the current stage the fire ought to be directed not on the national bourgeoisie, but on the main enemy—the ruling imperialist bloc.

Kuusinen's report ended with the section "Lenin's Injunctions Which Should Not Be Forgotten" in which he spoke of a number of fundamental conclusions made by Lenin in his theses and speeches for the Second Comintern Congress (July-August 1920). He went on, in the spirit of the Second

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1230.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1232. In speaking of the colonial proletariat, Kuusinen drew attention to its special traits: it was virtually everywhere first generation, overwhelmingly from the countryside and largely returning there, with few skilled workers, and its movements were "sporadic and impulsive".

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 8, No. 68, p. 1229.



Congress decisions, to draw attention to the great importance of the revolutionary movement in the East for world socialist revolution, especially underlining the international significance of the "Indian question".

Among the co-reporters after Kuusinen was Palmiro Togliatti who analysed the colonial policy of Social-Democrats. He recalled Lenin saying at the First Comintern Congress back in March 1919 that a party that does not give systematic and practical support to the revolutionary movement in the colonies is a party of betrayers. He also paid particular attention to the Congress of Labour and Socialist International in Brussels at which the colonial question had been debated. He recalled that many congresses of the Second International had already passed resolutions condemning the colonial policy of capitalist governments. But those documents did not contain "unconditioned affirmation of the right of all peoples to self-determination". That affirmation however, was not sufficient in itself, said Togliatti: "A colonial policy of the proletariat cannot limit itself to recognising this principle." It must proclaim that "the revolt of oppressed colonial peoples against their oppressors is an integral part of the proletarian world revolution and that consequently the proletariat of all lands must consider it as their own struggle and help it by all possible means... This is the task that Lenin alone recognised and proclaimed openly before the war, while the whole pre-war social democracy never came up to this standpoint."<sup>1</sup>

The policy of the Second International on the colonial question was described by Togliatti with full justification as a policy of colonial reformism. The decisions of the Brussels Congress of the Labour and Socialist International, Togliatti noted, actually denied the right of the colonial peoples to self-determination. He recalled that in regard to India the Brussels resolution, for example, expressed only support for "the efforts of the Indian people to obtain autonomy".

Long debates developed on the national-colonial issue. Most of the speakers roundly condemned the "decolonisation theory" and political conclusions from it on the complete shift of the colonial bourgeoisie to the side of imperialism. But several delegates, especially from the Communist Party of Great Britain, occupied a special position. For example, the speech of their delegate Bennett contained the idea that the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1235.

Comintern was underestimating the role and importance of the proletariat. Bennett opposed the paramount conclusion contained in the draft theses that said that the reformist bourgeoisie of India "may be driven by the logic of the struggle, especially in an acute revolutionary situation, to give up to some extent its policy of pendulating between the imperialist and nationalist revolutionary camps".<sup>1</sup> Bennett thought that the Indian bourgeoisie would not waver for a second, it was already acting in a counter-revolutionary direction. "Everyone who speaks about any shadow of a possibility of the national bourgeoisie playing any positive active part in the national revolution is spreading illusions," he said.<sup>2</sup> He cited the draft theses: in the first preparatory stage "it would be an ultra-left mistake to start the Communist Party agitation by simply identifying the national-reformists (Swarajists, Wafdists and others) with the ruling counter-revolutionary bloc of imperialists and feudal lords"; and then added "Well, comrades, I am prepared to go ahead and to be declared an ultra-leftist today, and to say that the Communist Party will have no possibility and no need to identify them. They will identify themselves—they will work together."<sup>3</sup>

Some Indian delegates supported Bennett. He received direct backing from Heinz Neumann of the German Communist Party, a man inclined towards leftist decisions and subsequently excluded from the Party. He said, "I firmly believe ... that the national bourgeoisie in India cannot play a revolutionary role for a long, and not even for a short period. On this question it is my opinion that it would be useful to make changes in the theses, with whose basic line I am otherwise in agreement. We must strike out some things in it, because they have been struck out by the course of development in China."<sup>4</sup>

The great bulk of speakers, however, opposed the theoretically unconvincing and sectarian conceptions of Roy, Bennett, Neumann and some others.

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 8, No. 72, p. 1321.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1322.

<sup>4</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 8, No. 76, p. 1419. Discussion around the "decolonisation theor" affected essentially a wider question: were agreements with the national bourgeoisie of oppressed countries generally feasible? Those who answered in the negative referred mainly to India where, they claimed, "decolonisation" was occurring and for that reason the bourgeoisie had evidently fused with imperialism.



In his concluding speech, Kuusinen consistently defended the viewpoint presented in the draft theses on the question under discussion. Opposing attacks from the left, he declared, "I must again emphasise that, in preparing the Draft Theses, the underlying leading thought for me was the independent role of the Proletariat in the revolutionary movement of the colonial countries, the attaining of the hegemony of the Proletariat including, as well, the leading role of the Communist parties."<sup>1</sup> He refuted the allegation that the theses have insufficient consideration to the problem of bourgeois-democratic revolution growing into socialist revolution. He drew attention to the fact that "the bourgeois-democratic revolution is a period in which the prerequisites of the socialist revolution are being prepared, but in itself this period does not go beyond its own frame."<sup>2</sup> It is untrue, he said that just "by this mutation the struggle decides everything... One has to add, struggle decides it all, when a minimum of the objective prerequisites exist."<sup>3</sup> He directly counterposed to the attack from the left one of Lenin's fundamental tactical conclusions in its proper understanding: "It is very important for a revolutionary to bear in mind the maxim of Napoleon, of which Lenin was so fond, that one should just throw oneself into the struggle and then one will see what is going to come out of it. However, Lenin never meant it in the sense that we need no theory and no analysis of the objective prerequisites, because only the struggle decides everything."<sup>4</sup>

Kuusinen devoted an important part of his summing up to criticism of the "decolonisation theory"; he underlined that the "difference of opinion in the decolonisation theory leads to political consequences as well."<sup>5</sup>

From the viewpoint of advocates of the "theory", he said, the national bourgeoisie of colonial countries was in the same camp as the imperialists. If we proceed from the real state of affairs, namely that imperialism is hampering the full development of forces of production of the colonies and that the national bourgeoisie in defending its class interests was in favour of liberating the country from imperialist oppres-

sion, it follows that the national bourgeoisie was playing a progressive role to some extent. Meanwhile, for adherents of the "theory", "the entire national bourgeoisie is simply counter-revolutionary and nothing else". In actual fact, things are different. For example, the Indian National Congress was allied to the Anti-Imperialist League, and the "present General Secretary of the Indian National Congress is Nehru Jr., a nationalist revolutionary".<sup>1</sup>

The draft theses, Kuusinen emphasised, did not contain assertions that the national bourgeoisie in the colonies would ally itself however temporarily with the national-revolutionary camp. The theses merely did not reject the possibility. What is more, he thought it possible to indicate the "danger" which would arise at the moment when part of the national bourgeoisie would temporarily come close to the national-revolutionary camp.

A commission for editing the draft theses was formed after discussion of the question of the revolutionary movement in the colonies and semi-colonies. It included some delegates who had criticised the draft from the leftist positions; as a result the document adopted by the Congress was substantially different from the draft. That gave grounds for Kuusinen later, at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to say that assessment by the Sixth Comintern Congress of the role of the national bourgeoisie in colonies and semi-colonies had "a tint of sectarianism about it".

That was an accurate evaluation. The Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies were not, of course, essentially sectarian, although they did have a tint of sectarianism. What is more, in the situation when betrayal by the Chinese bourgeoisie was bound to have its effect on all Comintern activity relating to the East, the Congress had adopted a basically realistic (though in many parts contradictory) document. What were its principal propositions?

The theses drawn up by Lenin and adopted by the Second Comintern Congress fully retained their importance and were to serve as a guide to further work of communist parties, the document said; since 1920 the significance of the colonies and semi-colonies as a factor in the crisis of the world capitalist system had increased even more. Revolution had

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 8, No. 81, p. 1521.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1520.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1524.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1525.



occurred in China, mass movements had started up in India and an insurrection had flared up in Indonesia in the intervening period. The theses went on to describe the state of the revolutionary movement in North Africa, the Arab countries and Latin America. Up till then imperialism had succeeded in putting down the revolutionary movement in oppressed countries, but it would break out and gain strength again and again. "The objective contradiction between the colonial policy of world imperialism and the independent development of the colonial peoples is by no means done away with either in China, or in India, or in any other of the colonial and semi-colonial countries; on the contrary, the contradiction only becomes more acute and can be overcome only by the victorious revolutionary struggle of the toiling masses in the colonies."<sup>1</sup> Contradictions between the imperialist world, on the one hand, and the USSR and the revolutionary movement within the capitalist countries, on the other, were of paramount importance for promotion of the revolutionary movement. The colonial peoples were living and developing in an epoch in which proletarian dictatorship was coming into being, while capitalism had already fulfilled its historically progressive role, had become a brake on further development, was in the process of disintegration, was giving way to proletarian dictatorship and would lead humanity to more and more catastrophes. In that situation there was the possibility both "of a non-capitalist path of development for the backward colonies" and the "growing-over" of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in the leading colonies into the proletarian socialist revolution with the aid of the victorious proletarian dictatorship in other countries".<sup>2</sup>

As far as imperialist colonial policy was concerned, it was ultimately retarding development of productive forces in the colonies; to the extent, however, that colonial exploitation presupposed a certain encouragement of economic development within the colonies, that development was channelled into an area advantageous to imperialism. The parasitic essence of imperialism was particularly obvious in the colonial economy. Imperialist domination conserved traditional relations of exploi-

<sup>1</sup> *The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies. Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies*, adopted by the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, 1928, Modern Books Limited, London, 1929, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

tation and bondage in the colonies as a result of which the mass of colonial peasantry was pauperised.<sup>1</sup>

That analysis enabled one to determine the principal directions of communist strategy and tactics in the oppressed countries. In that sense the theses focused attention on the problem of "Communist Strategy and Tactics in China and Similar Colonial Countries". Here what was being referred to was the bourgeois-democratic revolution which had reached the stage interpreted as preparation of prerequisites for socialist revolution. The bourgeois-democratic revolution had the following tasks to accomplish: to liberate the country from imperialist tyranny, establish national unity, change the balance of forces in favour of the proletariat (overthrow the pro-imperialist exploiting classes, organise worker-peasant councils and a Red army, establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, hegemony of the proletariat); implement agrarian revolution, nationalise land, ease radically the position of the peasants to ensure a closer alliance with the urban population; to spread working-class trade union organisation; strengthen the communist party, and help it win a firm leading position among the working people; to introduce an eight-hour working day, ensure equal rights of nations and sexes, separate church from state, abolish caste distinctions and effect other democratic measures.

"How far the bourgeois-democratic revolution will be able in practice to realise all its basic tasks, and how far it will be the case that part of these tasks will be carried into effect only by the socialist revolution, will depend on the course of the revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants... The transition of the revolution to a socialist phase demands the presence of certain minimum prerequisites, as, for example, a certain definite level of development in the country of industry, of trade union organisations of the proletariat and of a strong Communist Party. The most important is precisely the development of a strong Communist Party with a big mass influence..."<sup>2</sup> The development of a strong communist party with a big mass influence in China, India and similar colonies was an exceedingly slow and intricate process which, however, might be speeded up by the bourgeois-democratic revolution growing out of the objective conditions of the colonial countries.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.



What were the peculiarities of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in a colony? It differed from a bourgeois-democratic revolution in independent states mainly by the fact that it was organically bound up with the national liberation struggle against imperialist oppression. The national factor had a great effect on the course of the revolutionary process in all colonies, as well as in semi-colonies, where imperialist oppression took an undisguised form that antagonised the people. The problem of agrarian revolution along with the national liberation struggle constituted the axis of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in the most advanced colonies.

What was the position of individual classes and social groups in the "advanced colonial countries" in relation to the bourgeois-democratic revolution? "The national bourgeoisie in these colonial countries does not adopt a uniform attitude in relation to imperialism";<sup>1</sup> the countries referred to were China, India and similar colonies. With the exception of the compradore bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie (and particularly its industrial part) stands for the national movement.<sup>2</sup> It is a national-reformist tendency, unique, vacillating, inclined towards compromise, which the Second Comintern Congress termed a bourgeois-democratic orientation. In other words, the national bourgeoisie takes an intermediate position between the revolutionary and imperialist camps. China was the exception, for there the greater part of the national bourgeoisie, initially heading the national liberation war, subsequently utterly went over to the counter-revolutionary camp. Imperialism, eager to retain its position as an exclusive monopoly exploiter and having no intention voluntarily of granting hegemony over the "independent people" to the national bourgeoisie, demands capitulation from it on that point. The native bourgeoisie "again and again capitulates to imperialism", but its capitulation "is not final as long as the danger of class revolution on the part of the masses has not become immediate, acute and menacing".<sup>3</sup> Bearing in mind the vacillating policy of the national bourgeoisie, Communists should beware of misunderstanding the difference between national-reformist and national-revolutionary orientations. Moreover, if Communists were to underestimate the significance of bourgeois national-reformism as distinct from the feudal-imperialist camp, they could find

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

themselves isolated from the people. Communist parties in the colonies had to continue to deal with the tasks described by the Second Comintern Congress as their special tasks—those of campaigning for liberation of the working people from the influence of the bourgeoisie and national-reformism, without which "the basic strategical aim of the Communist movement in the bourgeois-democratic revolution—the hegemony of the proletariat—cannot be achieved".<sup>1</sup> And without hegemony of the proletariat, an integral part of which is the leading position of the communist party, the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and even more so socialist revolution, could not be brought to a successful end.

As far as the petty bourgeoisie was concerned, it consisted of various sections which at different times of the national-revolutionary movement played different roles. Part of it was interested outright in fighting imperialism. The petty-bourgeois intellectuals in the initial period of the national movement often expressed national aspirations, but, being bound up with the prevailing forms of landowning, the intellectuals, said the theses, could not express peasant interests. The poverty of the urban poor pushed them towards revolution. The peasants, along with the proletariat and as its ally, were the moving force of revolution. The most important allies of the working class included above all "the many millions of starving tenant-cultivators, petty peasants oppressed by want and groaning under all kinds of pre-capitalist and capitalist forms of exploitation",<sup>2</sup> and farm labourers. The top sections of the peasants could go over to the enemy as the revolution developed.

The working class of the colonies and semi-colonies differed fundamentally from the proletariat of capitalist states. For the most part it was a nascent class, made up of bankrupt artisans. The fluidity of its composition, the high percentage of women and children, the multilingual and illiterate problems, the power of religious and caste prejudices—all hampered systematic agitation and propaganda, and held back the growth of workers' self-awareness, the theses said. Between 1919 and 1923 workers of the colonies and semi-colonies were moving in the mainstream of the anti-imperialist struggle headed by the local bourgeoisie. After the Fifth Comintern Congress, i.e., after 1924, the working class in the colonies (we refer to the "advanced" colonies) was already emerging "as an

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.



independent class force directly opposing itself to the national bourgeoisie, and entering upon a struggle with the latter in defence of its own immediate class interests, and for hegemony in the national revolution as a whole".<sup>1</sup> The theses once again returned here to the question of the national bourgeoisie: "The national bourgeoisie has not the significance of a force in the struggle against imperialism."<sup>2</sup> It is in opposition to it. That circumstance had both a positive and a negative significance for the proletariat. The main thing was that the national bourgeoisie was exerting a retarding influence on the development of the revolutionary movement, in so far as it was able to lead the working people and prevent them from unfolding revolutionary struggle, but at the same time, by its opposition actions it could accelerate the political awakening of the working people. Communists should expose the national-reformist character of the national bourgeois parties.<sup>3</sup> As a rule, the petty-bourgeois parties evolved from national-revolutionary to national-reformist positions (the theses considered that that had happened to the Kuomintang, the Gandhists within the Indian National Congress, and to Sarekat Islam).

Such was the main content of the Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies. Its authors had taken account of the complexity, diversity and specificity of colonial and semi-colonial social systems. They attached serious attention to the national factor in the revolutionary movement of colonial and semi-colonial peoples; they saw how profoundly bourgeois-democratic revolutions in oppressed countries differed from bourgeois-democratic revolutions of the classical type and, as applied to the most advanced colonies and semi-colonies, they regarded the former as prerequisites and preparation for socialist revolution. On that basis they arrived at the conclusion that it was up to socialist revolution to resolve those democratic tasks which the revolution was not capable of dealing with at the preceding stage; they were convinced that the national bourgeoisie had many times displayed an inclination to collaboration yet had not lost its progressive potential. The proletariat of the oppressed countries had to take charge of the "transitional" revolution, but it was still weak, so it was a

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

long-term objective by which communist parties should be guided in their activity.

Meanwhile, although the final text of the theses indicated the progressive possibilities of the national bourgeoisie and its influence on the masses, those possibilities were considerably underestimated, however. The significance of the national-revolutionary movement was not properly evaluated and it was assumed that it would everywhere take the same course as the Kuomintang had done; the weight of diverse Oriental traditions was not yet fully taken into consideration.

The draft theses remained unchanged on the key point of "decolonisation". Having censured the "decolonisation theory", the Comintern thereby not only stressed the invariably reactionary and plundering essence of imperialism, it put an end to the "theoretical basis" which leftists had placed beneath their striving to impose on the Comintern a full rift with national-bourgeois groups, and simultaneously with the politically active part of the petty bourgeoisie of the colonies and semi-colonies.

The amendments made to the theses during editing amounted largely to the following: they included formulations overestimating the success of the proletariat of the colonies and semi-colonies in the struggle for hegemony over the national revolution; they removed the idea that Communists at the current stage should concentrate their fire on their direct principal foe, the imperialist-feudal bloc, rather than the national bourgeoisie; they excluded the conclusion on possibilities of the petty bourgeoisie coming to lead the anti-imperialist revolution.

Thus, the Sixth Congress Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies was a contradictory document. Some conclusions did not correspond to objective reality; in the following several years they were further developed to the detriment of realistic assessments and propositions. After the change in the Comintern policy in the mid-1930s the international communist movement by no means rejected the positive and realistic evaluations, forecasts and ideas of the Sixth Congress. But it did dismiss all that was theoretically untenable and created difficulties in winning the support of the masses.

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Creation of a united anti-imperialist front against fascism, war and colonial tyranny became absolutely essential in the mid-1930s.



The tactics of a broad national front, as experience shows, turns the communist party into a force whose influence counts immeasurably more than its membership. By taking a vanguard position in the battle for national liberation, by applying communist ideas to the specific conditions in which their people live and fight, by putting into effect the practical tasks which arise from concrete historical conditions—in other words, by following Lenin's behests, Communists give the national liberation movement broad scope, consistency and power, encourage the consolidation of national-revolutionary forces, isolate collusive elements, and reinforce their own influence.

Yet in the period between the Sixth and Seventh Comintern congresses many communist parties, concentrating on direct contention for worker-peasant power against the national bourgeoisie, which they regarded as a downright reactionary force, looking upon its left wing as most dangerous and directing their principal thrust against it, remained small detachments which, despite the unparalleled heroism of their fighters, could not implement the historic tasks of winning a deciding influence within the mass national liberation movement. Only at the end of the period did the young communist parties of the colonies and dependencies began to cure themselves of what Lenin called "the infantile disorder of 'left-wing communism'". Of enormous importance in this was the intensified struggle against sectarianism undertaken by the Comintern between 1924 and 1935, and the individual experience of the young parties which had suffered defeat in taking a leftist course, but had met with success when adhering to Leninist tactics, creatively utilising the experience of the Bolsheviks in gaining political influence among the people.

In its survey made in July 1935 for the Seventh Comintern Congress the Bureau of the ECCI Secretariat gave the following picture of the communist movement in Asia and Africa.

The Communist Party of Indonesia, after the setbacks of 1926-1927, no longer existed as an organised integral force; the Communist Party of Indochina was forced to function deep underground; the Communist Party of the Philippine Islands fell victim to repression soon after its founding and its leaders had been put in gaol; the Communist Party of India had been persecuted by the authorities and even during the years of upsurge in the liberation struggle (1929-1933) had enjoyed no more than a small influence among the people; the Communist Party of Turkey was only a small

group operating in difficult underground conditions; Korean Communists had not yet re-established their party and were still inconsiderable; the Communist Party of Palestine, having few ties with Arab working people and, from late 1920s, losing influence even among Jewish workers, had no mass base; the communist organisation of Tunisia never followed the tactics of a united front with the national-revolutionaries and remained an association of a few groups of European workers; Communists of Egypt had only a small group subject to constant police raids; a difficult situation faced Communists of Iran who, in conditions of vicious terror, were leading workers' strikes; the Communist Party of Algeria, one of the first to accept a policy of setting up a united antifascist front, was only beginning to win influence among the wide mass of Arab working people; at the same time the Communist Party of Syria was from 1933 conducting active work in winning over the people, had begun to act in the vanguard of the workers' strike campaign, had strengthened its position within trade unions, had taken measures to come closer to the national-revolutionary parties so as to set up a united anti-imperialist front, and had opposed the danger of an imperialist war and fascism (these were the first steps to converting it into a mass party). The Communist Party of China, whose leaders had still not directed their main attack against the Japanese aggressors, was experiencing hard times. In many countries of the East illusions persisted in communist parties which had not yet gained any worth-while success in winning over the people that the proletariat was already or was becoming the leader of revolution, and all the non-proletarian parties were forming a more or less united reactionary front.

The Anti-Imperialist League had actually wound up its work. The history of the organisation set up in 1927 is instructive: it shows how futile is an anti-imperialist policy if it is tinged with sectarianism. The League should have become a broad non-partisan organisation within whose ranks the Comintern and Communists representing it within the League could have had a revolutionising influence on mass liberation movements. The new organisation was supposed to have no communist character—either in form or in content. The Comintern then thought that a non-partisan organisation would bring most good to the cause of Communists striving to unite the proletarian movement in the West with the movement of oppressed peoples in the East. The Comintern saw the task of Communists in the League as



helping to draw new wide sections of working people in both East and West into the anti-imperialist struggle. For that to happen, it felt it necessary to pursue a policy of setting up an anti-imperialist united front not merely from below, but from above, entering into negotiations and agreements with left Social-Democrats, national-reformists, national-revolutionaries and progressive groups of intellectuals. The League's platform was to be sufficiently broad to attract all organisations really capable of waging a realistic struggle against imperialism and enjoying genuine authority among the people. The Communists were to retain their class and party independence. Foreseeing that the social-democratic leaders and other reformists would attempt to take control of the League, the Comintern attributed great importance to uniting communist factions in the organisation.

Comintern documents adopted in 1927, after Chiang Kaishek in collusion with bourgeois-landowner groups had turned on the Communist Party of China, quite rightly noted that the bourgeoisie in the most advanced colonies and semi-colonies was inclined to an alliance with imperialism against revolution, but in other oppressed countries the League should operate on the widest possible basis. The vacillating and even perfidious policy of the local bourgeoisie, emphasised the Comintern, should not prevent Communists from exploiting the contradictions between imperialist powers and national-reformism. So, the task was not to turn anti-imperialist forces attached to the League into communist, but first, to encourage them to move leftwards and, second to establish contact through them with those wide sections of the people who were following them. Any imposition on the League of communist ideology would lead to the League becoming only an organisation of those groups which adhered to communist positions or were ready to move towards them, while "intermediate" forces would have left it, feeling deeply disillusioned and let down. And that is precisely what happened after a period of substantial success of the League, which made an important contribution to establishing an anti-imperialist united front on a worldwide scale.

Already by the autumn of 1929 the Comintern Executive had concluded that the major and direct objective of the League was to launch a mass revolutionary movement of workers and peasants in the colonies. Communists in the League were to orient its activity on uncompromising struggle against national-reformists and especially their left wing. In March 1930 the Comintern Executive again returned to the League. On the one hand, it felt that social-reformists and national-reformists were intending to

split the League; in that connection it stressed once again: the League should not be turned into a purely communist organisation. But at the same time it was in fact supposed that soon there would be no "intermediate" political forces standing between the grass roots membership, on the one hand, and Communists, on the other. On a genuinely world scale that evaluation did not correspond to reality; within the framework of the international organisation associated with the Comintern it was possible that "intermediate" groups could be forced out of the League. Firstly, however, that did not mean eliminating them from real political life and, secondly, it would lead to the same conversion of the League into a communist organisation which the Comintern thought undesirable. Meanwhile the "intermediate" sections began to quit the League.

The first period of League activity showed that the non-partisan nature of the mass Anti-Imperialist League—as an allied anti-imperialist organisation—corresponded to the tasks of the communist movement. Its success testified to the fact that the class objectives of Communists and the anti-imperialist goals of other progressive forces were not in conflict; on the contrary, they complement one another. In principle the joint action of Communists in the common organisation with other anti-imperialist forces was perfectly possible, justified and could produce beneficial results both for the communist movement and for the anti-imperialist struggle as a whole. Meanwhile, the history of the League at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s demonstrated that any attempt to lend the organisation of a united anti-imperialist front a distinct communist character could only bring harm to the common cause. As a result the League ceased to play that effective role in launching a mass anti-imperialist struggle which it had played in the past.

At that time (late 1920s and early 1930s) many communist parties of the East drew on the very rich experience of Russian Communists and used it often in a one-sided manner, without taking their own situation into account.

In 1917 the real possibility of a victorious socialist revolution opened up before Russia, a country with an average level of capitalist development, intensively moving into the monopoly phase, a country that had not completed the democratic revolution, with a comparatively small but highly organised working class, that had come through a great school of class battles, and a vast number of poor peasants. It was



the only way for the country to get out of the war which had brought the peoples of Russia to the brink, and for it to resolve urgent democratic tasks. Lenin had pointed to that possibility. The experienced and battle-hardened Bolshevik Party in that situation created in a brief span a powerful political army of socialist revolution. The collaborationist parties of Mensheviks and Socialist-revolutionaries in whom the people had believed up till then utterly fled into the camp of the liberal bourgeoisie opposed to revolution when faced with the mounting revolutionary upsurge. Exposure of the petty-bourgeois parties and their isolation from the people were therefore a necessary condition of triumph of socialist revolution.

The situation during the 1920s and 1930s was quite different in Eastern countries where it was primarily a question of national independence. Hegemony of the working class and the coming to power of communist parties was not the only way for that to be attained. The propertied classes were fighting against imperialism, and their left wing—first and foremost the petty bourgeois—had taken up a national-revolutionary stand; the vast mass of working people followed them. Lenin showed Communists in the East that they were capable of impelling bourgeois reformists to more decisive actions against imperialism, simultaneously aiding national-revolutionary forces in opposing reformist influence on the working people. The proletariat of the East was weak, and communist parties represented only small detachments of fighters. In such conditions confrontation with the national bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois democrats (first and foremost with petty-bourgeois democrats) meant an attempt to skip across an unfinished stage of the movement. As a consequence, many Eastern communist parties at the time found themselves isolated, despite the fact that Communists were utterly devoted to their people, to the cause of revolution and did not begrudge effort or even life in the fight to liberate the working people.

As fascism got on the move, the train of events showed the need for the communist movement to work out a new strategy aimed at uniting all revolutionary and democratic forces against fascism. One of the first experiences of the united anti-fascist front was the February 1934 uprising in Austria where worker Communists and Social-Democrats fought together against the reactionary dictatorship. Fascist leagues tried to seize power in France in February 1934, but leaders of the Socialist Party under pressure from the mass

of rank-and-file Socialists agreed to form a united antifascist front with Communists. In October 1934 Spanish worker Communists, Socialists and anarchists jointly took part in a gigantic strike that spread over the whole country and was directed against the fascist danger. Social-Democrats, whose right-wing leadership had earlier rejected any agreement with Communists, were now obliged to change their tactics in the face of mounting fascism. Success in consolidating anti-fascist forces in Europe would have been even greater if the Executive Committee of the Labour and Socialist International had consented to set up a united front with Communists on an international scale.

The first signs of a change in the policy of individual Eastern communist parties date to this period. For example, already in early 1935 Indian Communists were undertaking vigorous measures to create unity of the trade union movement through class struggle and trade union democracy.

The Comintern fully assessed the socio-political situation that was taking shape with the advance of fascism. In that connection it drew particular attention to the beginnings of a new strategy in the communist movement. When we look at this strategy we should stress that the Comintern, along with communist parties, was its creator. More and more frequently it was acting as initiator of political approaches and decisions, insistently demonstrating the prime need for uniting all forces capable of actively opposing fascism and the threat of a new world war and the elimination of democracy. From the first part of 1934 the Comintern was starting to revise certain outdated or incorrect propositions which hampered unification of the entire working class against fascism and, in the East, the formation of a united front against imperialism.

In the summer of 1934 commissions met to prepare fundamental points of the agenda for the coming Seventh Comintern Congress. Many outstanding figures of the international communist movement took part in the work of those commissions; they included Georgi Dimitrov, D. Z. Manuilsky, Otto Kuusinen, Palmiro Togliatti, O. A. Pyatnitsky, Wilhelm Pieck, Bohumir Šmeral, Wang Ming and Béla Kun. They focused attention on such issues as the onset of fascism, attitude to Social-Democrats, assessment of their left wing, and the policy of a united antifascist front. In demonstrating the need for Communists to alter their political course, Manuilsky in particular said that Communists in Germany



had not succeeded in heading the popular movement; their proletarian dictatorship slogan advanced abstractly had not corresponded to the specific conditions; in recent years communists parties had mistakenly regarded Communists and Social-Democrats as the major competing forces of the period. He drew attention to the importance of slogans of a transitional character and recalled that Lenin had advanced such slogans even during the most acute revolutionary crises.

Georgi Dimitrov made a weighty contribution to drawing up the new strategy in putting forward the idea that the key question was to set up a united front in the fight against the onset of fascism. There was confusion in parties over tactical questions, he said; they had to revise outdated tactics and methods on the basis of recent experience; they should comprehensively use the experience of the last ten years, both the positive and the negative. Dimitrov and Manuïlsky were supported by Togliatti, Pieck and Kuusinen. But not all their suggestions met with unanimous approval in the commissions. The hold of the past was too strong.

One of those who did all he could to turn the Comintern and its parties to a new political orientation was Eastern Secretariat head Otto Kuusinen. In July 1934 he noted bitterly that Comintern Eastern sections had been unable to lead the masses at decisive moments. He called for the most searching self-criticism, and insisted that the fight for proletarian hegemony in the anti-capitalist and anti-feudal revolution should be the strategic goal of communist parties in the colonies and semi-colonies; but simply announcing the objective was not enough. Communists had systematically and effectively to take part in the popular struggle for the people's needs and demands, initiating and organising that struggle, tirelessly working among the mass of working people who had not yet understood revolutionary objectives of the struggle and were under the influence of the national-reformist bourgeoisie.

As a result of the work of the preparatory commissions the draft theses "The World Situation and Tasks of the Comintern" were written; they contained many ideas fully uncovered at the Seventh Congress. The initial draft of August 1934 did not contain a special section devoted to the national-colonial question. The draft theses compiled in January 1935, however, had the section "Special Tasks of Colonial Countries", which said that communist parties of Asia and Africa should work in existing trade union organi-

sations, "latch on to all forms of workers' organisations no matter how primitive and backward they might be", conduct mass work in societies of countrymen, cooperative and mutual-aid fund societies, etc. Communists should combine defence of proletarian class interests with a broad anti-imperialist united front. For that they would have to participate in all mass anti-imperialist movements, not excluding even those which were headed by national-reformists, "to extend and raise up those movements, advancing slogans, forms and methods of struggle corresponding to the level of fighting capacity of the people in connection with the stratification process among those following the national-reformist leadership, to turn to individual local trade union, peasant and petty-bourgeois organisations and groups of national-reformists with proposals relating to methods, forms and objectives of anti-imperialist actions".

Moreover, Communists would have to concentrate on aspects and causes that really concerned the people. Communists in oppressed countries were faced with the task of entering into agreements with national-reformist and national-revolutionary groups for the sake of successful anti-imperialist actions, while retaining in all circumstances their political and organisational independence. The need was especially stressed for Communists to work in peasant organisations, to involve themselves in spontaneous peasant movements and defend the vital interests of the peasantry. The draft did not set communist parties the task of immediately winning leadership of the national movement; nor did it at any point proceed from the notion that such leadership had already been attained (such an assessment would not have corresponded to the actual state of affairs; only the Communist Party of China had any real chance of heading the liberation movement in the situation of the growing Japanese invasion, although the illusions of Communist Party leaders that the Party already had leadership over the mass movement prevented those opportunities from being realised). The communist parties in imperialist countries were given the task of resolutely supporting the popular struggle in the colonies against "their own" imperialism, demanding the immediate withdrawal of all imperialist military forces from the colonies and granting the latter complete state independence, calling upon the metropolitan workers to rebuff the imperialist pressure and to unite with the oppressed peoples of the colonies.

In China the Communist Party actively was taking part in the anti-imperialist and agrarian revolution, the draft noted; it



had organised several Soviet districts and had built a Red Army; at the same time in the Kuomintang China "Communists had not yet overcome their weakness in the anti-imperialist movement and do not have strong mass positions within the trade union movement". In regard to the Communist Party of India it said that it could not become a national party of the proletariat without overcoming sectarianism in its attitude to the anti-imperialist struggle and the trade union movement; the Communist Party of Indochina, which had already led big revolutionary battles, had not yet switched its main attention to the proletarian masses; and in Palestine, Syria, Algeria and Tunisia the "Arabisation" of the communist movement was the main task of the communist parties and the main condition of their growth.

Yet another version of the draft theses, compiled in April 1935, devoted a special paragraph in the "Immediate Tasks" section to problems of the colonial and semi-colonial countries. By contrast with the corresponding section of the previous version, this paragraph was more concise. The task of setting up an anti-imperialist popular front was formulated more clearly and advanced to the forefront.

It was then, in April 1935, that Dimitrov made his remarks on the "Immediate Tasks" section. He noted that tasks of communist parties in fighting for unity of the working class, against the onslaught of capital, against fascism and the threat of war were becoming increasingly complex. That put particular responsibility on the central agencies of the Comintern and required them to "enhance general ideological-political leadership". At the same time he thought it necessary for communist parties to have an independent confident leadership of the popular struggle. The focus of the work of Comintern leading agencies "should finally shift to resolving the basic issues of policy and tactics of the communist movement, concentrating the main effort on strengthening leadership of the sections themselves so that they can, guided by the basic principled propositions of the Communist International, independently deal with their specific political, tactical and organisational questions. And the everyday leadership of the communist movement should regularly be shifted to the localities." Dimitrov's recommendations were designed not simply to extend the independent role of communist parties—as sections of the Comintern, but to strengthen the authority and influence of the Comintern Executive. Those were the two aspects of one task to unite the world communist movement on the basis of proletarian internationalism and to reinforce its leadership with account for the specific condi-

tions of individual countries and regions. Dimitrov believed that the Comintern should help communist parties in sharing experience and using the experience of the world communist movement as a whole. He stressed that they should never replace specific Marxist analysis by general formulas. A comprehensive study of and account for specific conditions came to the forefront.

In late June 1935 Dimitrov and Manuisky prepared recommendations on the second point on the agenda of the Seventh Congress: "The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Fight for the Unity of the Working Class Against Fascism". These recommendations suggested that an integral political line ought to be formulated in the report; it should be shown that humanity was being faced with a choice: barbarity and fascism or progress and socialism. In their report, Dimitrov and Manuisky thought it necessary to explain why fascism had come to power, to indicate the policy of class collaboration pursued by social-democracy and leading to a split in the proletariat, its isolation from any allies and the underestimation of fascism. They posed the question of combating fascism where it had not prevailed—in the USA, Great Britain and France—and advanced the task of overthrowing "victorious fascism". In their opinion, the report should talk of drawing the most diverse forces into the struggle against fascism.

On the eve of the Seventh Congress scheduled for July 1935, the periodical *Kommunistichesky Internatsional* published an article in Nos. 20-21 "The Fight for a United Front in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies".<sup>1</sup> For the first time the new political line of the world communist movement on the national-colonial issue was spelled out in a summarised form. The article noted the existence of contradictions between the interests of imperialism and of the bourgeoisie of the colonies and semi-colonies, the rapid growth of the national liberation movement and the participation in it of the working class and peasantry. It stressed that the main support of imperialism in backward countries was feudal-compradore elements used by imperialism in combating the national bourgeoisie. The latter economically and politically did not constitute a compact, homogeneous unity: left trends which were developing towards national-revolutionary positions were dissociating themselves from national-reformist parties. But even the national-reformist organisa-

<sup>1</sup> *Kommunistichesky Internatsional*, Nos. 20-21, 1935, pp. 103-11.



tions, with an upsurge in the national liberation movement and onslaught of imperialism, were sometimes inclined to support the popular struggle. Moreover, in the situation of outright imperialist intervention in China individual bourgeois groups could take part in the anti-imperialist struggle.

*Kommunistichesky Internatsional* stressed: "Now, when tasks of preparing popular revolutions against imperialism have become the order of the day, communist parties must no longer confine themselves to advancing predominantly propagandist slogans of fighting for Soviet power, for confiscation of all landowners' land, without account of the level of the movement, the degree of readiness of the people, the stage of revolution, of the specific peculiarities of the struggle in a particular colony or semi-colony."

In the situation in which a considerable part of workers and the vast bulk of working people had either not yet risen to participation in active political affairs, or were following bourgeois national-reformists and petty-bourgeois parties, the ability of Communists to attract the working class and those who supported national-reformist parties to revolutionary actions on the basis of a united front was decisive for success of the revolution. Only by fighting for the establishment of a united national front, the article said, could the proletariat grow into a mighty political force uniting allies around itself, would gain leadership of the movement, isolating the national-reformist bourgeoisie, and the communist parties would become mass parties and acquire the necessary maturity for spearheading the revolutionary struggle of working people for national and social emancipation. It went on to say that "refusal to pursue united national front tactics under the pretext of the dangers which joint action with the national bourgeoisie against imperialism might bring, was in reality a rejection of preparation for national liberation revolutions and would invariably lead to isolation of communist parties from the broad popular movement".<sup>1</sup>

The periodical considered the national-reformist support of the liberation struggle not only and not so much a manoeuvre calculated to prevent the people from siding with communist parties. "In the first place," the article said, "it is a class position of the colonial bourgeoisie [having in mind the national bourgeoisie of colonial countries—A.R.], a position of vacillation between imperialism and national revolution." Whether these

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

groups would serve as a barrier in the way of or a bridge to the development of the people towards revolution would primarily depend on the policy of communist parties.

The article condemned the erroneous idea that the proletariat in the colonies and semi-colonies had already won leadership within the national liberation movement, the attitude to all non-proletarian parties as to a joint counter-revolutionary front, the "neutrality" of Communists in battles against imperialism: "There is nothing more mistaken than the notion that 'the proletariat would lose its hegemony' (which it had not yet won, incidentally) if Communists entered into a temporary agreement with national-reformist organisations to combat imperialism, while retaining (that was the fundamental condition of such agreements!) its organisational and political independence, its right to criticise the vacillations and inconsistency of its provisional allies or fellow-travellers." Finally, the communist parties, while putting forward a radical land policy, independently organising the peasants and preparing thereby transition of revolution from the stage of a united national front to that of full-scale agrarian revolution, which in turn would extend the popular struggle against imperialism, should not advance the slogan, at that stage, of confiscating landowners' lands without indemnity as a condition of the anti-imperialist agreement with the national-revolutionaries and national-reformists.<sup>1</sup>

This important article contained fresh ideas and propositions worked out by Comintern leadership in preparing for the Seventh Congress.

The Congress took place in Moscow between July and August 1935. Georgi Dimitrov read the report on "The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Fight for the Unity of the Working Class Against Fascism". This report, as well as his summing up and speech at the closing of the Congress reflected salient theoretical propositions worked out by Comintern leaders through generalising the experience of the communist movement. The main ideas of the report had been worked out with the active participation of the Central Committee of the All-Russia Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and had received the approval of its Politburo and members of other Comintern sections before the Congress.

Dimitrov paid much attention in his report to defining

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-111.



fascism: "...Fascism in power is the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital." He went on to say that fascism in Germany "is bestial chauvinism. It is a government system of political banditry... German fascism is acting as the spearhead of international counter-revolution, as the chief incendiary of imperialist war, as the initiator of a crusade against the Soviet Union, the great fatherland of the toilers of the whole world."<sup>2</sup> He noted that the triumph of fascism in Germany testified to the weakness of the proletariat, on the one hand, and the inability of the bourgeoisie to maintain its dictatorship by the old methods, on the other. Fascism was able to gain power primarily because, as a consequence of the collusive policy of social-democratic leaders, the working class was split, politically and organisationally disarmed in the face of the bourgeois onslaught, while Communists were insufficiently strong to raise the people and lead them to fight resolutely against fascism.

How could fascism be stopped and how could triumphant fascism be overthrown? "To this the Communist International replies: The first thing that must be done, the thing with which to commence, is to form a united front, to establish unity of action of the workers in every factory, in every district, in every region, in every country, all over the world. Unity of action of the proletariat on a national and international scale is the mighty weapon which renders the working class capable not only of successful defence but also of successful counter-offensive against fascism, against the class enemy."<sup>3</sup> The joint actions of Communists and Socialists, he emphasised, would facilitate popular resistance to the fascist offensive and increase the political weight of the working class; they would exert a mighty influence on other political sections of the working class and on all sections of the working people (the peasants, urban petty bourgeoisie and intellectuals). But that was not all. "The proletariat of the imperialist countries has possible allies not only in the toilers of its own countries but also in the oppressed nations of the colonies and semi-

colonies... Every step on the road to unity of action, directed towards the support of the struggle for the liberation of the colonial peoples on the part of the proletariat of the imperialist countries, denotes the transformation of the colonies and semi-colonies into one of the most important reserves of the world proletariat."<sup>1</sup> International unity of the proletariat rests on the constantly growing strength of the proletarian state, the country of socialism—the Soviet Union.

"The establishment of unity of action by all sections of the working class, irrespective of their party or organisational affiliation, is necessary even before the majority of the working class is united in the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and the victory of the proletarian revolution."<sup>2</sup> A. united front of workers must stop fascism, the onslaught of capital, to ward off the threat of war, to oppose the class foe. Communists should, on the basis of a united proletarian front, fight to establish a broad popular antifascist front. In the new international and domestic situation in all colonial and semi-colonial countries, said Dimitrov, an anti-imperialist united front assumed paramount importance. "In forming a wide anti-imperialist united front of struggle in the colonies and semi-colonies," the report stressed, "it is necessary above all to recognise the variety of conditions on which the anti-imperialist struggle of the masses is proceeding, the varying degree of maturity of the national liberation movement, the role of the proletariat within it and the influence of the Communist Party over the broad masses."<sup>3</sup> Problems of a united anti-imperialist front in the East were examined on examples of India and China, the biggest oppressed countries.

In India, the report said, Communists should take part in all anti-imperialist mass actions, support and extend them—not excluding those headed by national-reformists. By retaining their political and organisational independence, Communists should conduct energetic work in organisations taking part in the Indian National Congress, encouraging the crystallisation within them of a national-revolutionary wing for the purpose of further promoting the national liberation movement.

In China, where the popular movement had led to the establishment of people's government (in the form of councils—Soviets) over considerable territory and to the organisation

<sup>1</sup> G. Dimitrov, *The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Fight for the Unity of the Working Class Against Fascism*, Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the U.S.S.R., Moscow-Leningrad, 1935, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.



of a powerful Red Army, the predatory advance of Japanese imperialism and the perfidy of the Nanking government menaced the national existence of the great Chinese people. "We therefore approve," said Dimitrov, "the initiative taken by our courageous brother Party of China in the creation of a most extensive anti-imperialist united front against Japanese imperialism and its Chinese agents, jointly with all those organized forces existing on the territory of China which are ready to wage a real struggle for the salvation of their country and their people."<sup>1</sup>

Although the question of the national liberation movement was not a special item on the agenda of the Seventh Congress, its resolutions directly affected the problem, in so far as they signified a radical change in the tactics of the world communist movement. The resolutions oriented the international communist movement on establishing a united front—antifascist in the West and anti-imperialist in the East.

The reports by Wilhelm Pieck on Comintern activity and by D. Z. Manuilsky "The Results of Socialist Construction in the Soviet Union" were of exceptional importance. Manuilsky stressed in his report the international importance of the great achievements of the Soviet people led by the Bolshevik Party in establishing the first socialist society in the world.

Problems of Comintern strategy and tactics on the national-colonial question occupied an important place in the report given by Palmiro Togliatti "The Tasks of the Communist International in Connection with the Imperialists' Preparation For a New World War". He noted that "the attack of fascist Italy on Abyssinia will inevitably result in a new sharpening of the antagonisms and open struggle between the imperialist world and

the colonial peoples".<sup>1</sup> He expressed the opinion that "a war of fascism against the last free Native State of Africa will produce reaction and indignation in all Black Africa, in all the Arab countries and in Mohammedan India".<sup>2</sup> He demonstrated the internationalist policy of the Italian Communist Party which had put forward the slogan "Hands Off Abyssinia!". Togliatti underlined the great importance of the Second Comintern Congress decisions for the struggle of oppressed peoples: "Our Second World Congress in 1920 greeted the struggle of the oppressed peoples of Asia against imperialism as an integral part of the world revolution. It pledged all the revolutionaries to support this struggle with all their power and by all means... The Seventh Congress of the Communist International once more proclaims that the Communists are the vanguard of every struggle against imperialism."<sup>3</sup>

Extensive debate developed on the principal reports at the Congress. Though the Congress agreed on the timeliness and need for the Comintern to shift to a new political orientation, the debate demonstrated, however, that illusions and routine thinking were very difficult to overcome.

Wang Ming devoted a great deal of time to the revolutionary movement in the colonies and semi-colonies and communist party tactics. He noted in particular that the assault of imperialism on the colonial and semi-colonial peoples was assuming a vast scale; the growing national indignation was creating conditions for forming a united anti-imperialist front of the widest sections of people; contradictions between the colonial and imperialist bourgeoisie were intensifying; national-revolutionary groups were emerging in reformist parties and splits were obvious in several of them; the authority of the proletariat and its parties was increasing. Wang Ming drew attention to the development of revolution in China, to the armed actions against imperialism in Indochina, to the naval mutiny in Indonesia, to the rise in the worker and peasant movement in India and to other facts testifying to the upsurge in the revolutionary struggle in the colonies and semi-colonies. Like many other delegates, he stressed that the growth in revolutionary forces was taking place under the direct and vast influence of the October Revolution and the achievements in building socialism within the Soviet Union.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75. The appeal of the CPC Central Committee and the Provisional Central Soviet Government of 1 August 1935, prepared with the active support of the Comintern Executive and CPC delegates to the Seventh Congress, put forward a number of slogans directed at unifying all anti-imperialist forces; the document expressed readiness to stop military actions against Chiang Kaishek and hold out a hand for joint armed struggle against Japanese aggression. But CPC leadership inside the country, headed by Mao Zedong took a different view of things; in early August they adopted decisions ignoring the need to establish a united anti-imperialist front. The course of events proved the correctness and vitality of Comintern recommendations orienting the Communist Party of China on fighting for concerted action of all national forces against Japanese imperialism. See: *VII kongress Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala i borba protiv fashizma i voyny (Sbornik dokumentov)*, Politizdat, Moscow, 1975, p. 511.

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 15, No. 49, 1935, p. 1239.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1240.



Talking of the situation in China, Wang Ming noted that the Communist Party of China had not yet succeeded in consistently and correctly implementing the united front tactics. He was particularly critical in his assessment of party tactics at the time of the Fukien events, when the party leadership had given no backing to the insurrection of the 19th Army against Chiang Kaishek. The question of a united anti-imperialist front in China, he said, should now be put in a new way: along with the Soviet government of China, the Communist Party of China should appeal to the whole people, to all parties, troops and mass organisations with the suggestion of forming, together with the Communists, an all-China united popular government of national defence.

Wang Ming dwelt also on the problems of communist tactics in Arab countries, in Latin America as well as on problems of the unity of the trade union movement. There was an important idea in his report which was in line with the overall conception of the Comintern: it was precisely the policy of a united anti-imperialist front that would strengthen the communist parties and open up the way for the proletariat to leadership of the revolutionary movement in the colonies and dependencies. Proletarian leadership would be won by systematic and selfless practical work within the framework of the united front, and was certainly not an alternative to it.

A delegate from Indian Communists informed the Congress that in late 1933 the Communist Party of India had managed to restore its organisational structure and elect a Provisional Central Committee. He criticised sectarian errors that had been committed in his Party's activity. He felt that Indian Communists had done wrong in not giving a timely resolute rebuff to the splitting activity of trade union reformists and not taking a timely line of uniting the Red Trade Union Centre with the national-reformist trade union centre. However, he said, subsequently Communists and the Red Trade Union Centre had taken part in a joint trade union conference of textile workers, even though they had been in a minority there. The Communist Party representative said that the influence of national-reformists among the people was by no means paralysed and that, losing confidence in the right wing of the INC, the masses were not nevertheless breaking with the Congress; they saw in it an organisation of general national opposition to imperialism. The delegate noted progressive changes in the Congress which were the result of the mass worker and peasant movement. It was clear, he said, that Indian Communists had

made a mistake in thinking that they could organise a broad anti-imperialist united front on the basis of "Communist Party maximum demands" (establishment of a Soviet worker-peasant republic and confiscation of all mills, factories, plantations and lands without compensation). Communists were now pursuing a policy of working inside the INC so as to set up a broad national front on its basis. He singled out as an achievement the agreement concluded between the Red and national-reformist trade union centres on uniting their organisations through class struggle and democracy. He particularly underlined the importance of Soviet achievements which were inspiring the colonial peoples, and the impact of successful construction of socialism in the USSR on Indian working people; he spoke of those unforgettable and inspiring lessons provided by the solution of the national problem in the USSR, elimination of illiteracy and improvement of Soviet people's living conditions. At the same time he put forward the suggestion that left leaders of the INC were striving to distract people's attention from the active revolutionary struggle against the "servile constitution" imposed on India by the British. Like speeches of many other delegates, that of the Indian Communist testified to the initial success in elaborating a new political orientation. But these were indeed the first successes.

Several delegates of the Communist Party of China spoke at the Congress. One of them followed Wang Ming in drawing attention to the fact that leadership of the CPC had made a mistake in not granting help by Red Army action to Kuomintang troops mutinying against Chiang Kaishek. All the same, he considered that the main enemy was Chiang Kaishek and not Japanese imperialism, which by that time had launched its aggression against China. Another Chinese delegate said that the CPC had until recently not appreciated the need for and possibility of creating an anti-Japanese general national united front with the participation of the national bourgeoisie and military-political groups.

A delegate from the Communist Party of the Philippine Islands stated that the CPPI had, straight after its emergence, launched a struggle for the country's complete independence and for a worker-peasant Soviet republic. Admitting certain mistakes in party work (like the fact that the Party had not advanced the slogan of trade union unity), he expressed the conviction that national liberation, land reforms and the eight-hour working day could be ensured only through establishing worker-peasant government in the Philippines.



Representatives of the communist parties of Syria, Egypt and Palestine all spoke at the Congress. The Palestinian delegate noted that the Communist Party had for long stood aside from the Arab people; the turn to "Arabisation" had come only in early 1935. Another Palestinian Communist stated that the former leadership of the Party had advocated socialist revolution as the immediate objective and had unjustifiably focused activity against national-reformist organisations. As a Syrian Communist Party representative informed the Congress, the Party had already managed in 1933 to shed many of its sectarian errors. In particular it condemned the rejection of joint action with national-revolutionary forces and claimed that it now had a base among the Arab proletariat. But even after 1933 the Party had sometimes wavered to leftist positions, put forward slogans that were essentially socialist and found no response among the people, in so far as they had been advanced prematurely.

A delegate of Egyptian Communists, recognising the presence of contradictions between the Egyptian bourgeoisie and British imperialism, and self-critically condemning the refusal of Communists to take part in the national struggle at the beginning of the 1930s, nonetheless felt that the Communist Party should wage outright struggle for dictatorship by the working class and peasantry, and for Soviets (people's councils).

The representative of the Communist Party of Indochina believed that the main reason for weak popular support was "the absence of tactics of a united popular anti-imperialist front". He thought it possible to have businesslike agreements with national-reformists.

Thus, representatives of communist parties of Eastern countries expressed varied attitudes to the united front policy recommended by the Comintern. That was due to the various degree of maturity of communist parties and their leadership. It was also evident from the speeches that the Comintern Executive had quite rightly proceeded from the notion that such a very complex political action as a change in a communist party's policy could not be carried out "by fiat". Sectarianism was overcome in each party very gradually. The contention with it was very intricate and embraced questions of trade union unity, joint actions with national-revolutionary forces, agreements with national-reformists, and work within broad national organisations. The Eastern communist parties only made a complete political turn towards the united front some time after the Seventh Comintern Congress, whose propositions were in turn

deepened and made more concrete by decisions of the Comintern Executive and its Secretariat.

The Seventh Congress was instrumental in Eastern communist parties' turn to a new political orientation. In the first place, the Congress consolidated the attainments in that area which the Comintern Executive and communist parties had already won, and elaborated on the basis of Marxism-Leninism a new (compared to the preceding period) approach to tactics. Secondly, a distinguishing feature of the Congress was that it "took things as they were".<sup>1</sup> It may well be that many communist leaders in the East had not yet made all the necessary and timely tactical conclusions, but in the atmosphere in which the Congress was prepared and in the course of its work, they objectively assessed their possibilities and the real situation in the country. That was a necessary condition for further positive changes in tactics. Thirdly, the immense attention which the Congress gave to uniting all progressive forces against fascism was understood by delegates of many Eastern communist parties as an indication of the danger threatening their countries from Japanese militarism, of the greatest importance of creating a united front against that dangerous foe—a long-term orientation necessary for saving their countries. And finally, fourthly, during preparations and the work of the Congress representatives of Eastern communist parties and their leaders convinced themselves how resolutely the Comintern, the most experienced figures in the international communist movement, gave up ideas that had not been confirmed by practical experience. The preparation for and work of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International was a great political school for Communists from the colonies and semi-colonies.

In summing up the debate on his report, 13 August, Dimitrov, speaking of the colonies and semi-colonies, emphasised that it was not a matter there of the type of fascism that they had in Germany and Italy. He called upon delegates to "study and take into account the quite different economic, political and historical conditions, in accordance with which fascism is assuming, and will continue to assume, peculiar

<sup>1</sup> In his concluding speech on 20 August, Dimitrov referred to Marx's words: "We must take things as they are—that is, safeguard revolutionary interests in a way that corresponds to the changed situation" (Marx / Engels, *Werke*, Bd. 21, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1965, S. 521). And Dimitrov added, "This is the gist of the matter. This we must never forget" (G. Dimitrov, *op. cit.*, p. 165).



forms of its own".<sup>1</sup> He stressed that "it must not be imagined that the Social-Democratic workers who are becoming revolutionized will *at once* and on a mass scale adopt the position of consistent class struggle, and will *straightaway* unite with the Communists without any intermediate stages. In a number of countries this will be a more or less difficult, a more or less complicated and prolonged process, essentially dependent, at any rate, on the correctness of our policy and tactics."<sup>2</sup> And he prophetically forecast, "The eyes of millions of workers, peasants, petty townsfolk, office workers and intellectuals, of colonial peoples and oppressed nationalities are turned toward Moscow, the great capital of the *first* but not *last* state of the international proletariat."<sup>3</sup>

In the resolution on Dimitrov's report adopted by the Seventh Congress, an anti-imperialist popular front was described as the paramount task of Communists in the colonies and semi-colonies. For that, the resolution said, it was necessary to draw the widest sections of the people into the national liberation movement against growing imperialist exploitation, against vicious servitude, for driving out the imperialists, for national independence. The congress resolution clearly set communist parties the objective of taking an active part in the mass anti-imperialist movements led by national-reformists and of organising anti-imperialist actions together with national-revolutionaries and national-reformists on the basis of a specific anti-imperialist platform.

In regard to China, the resolution said that extension of the Soviet movement and strengthening of the fighting power of the Red Army must be combined with development of the popular anti-imperialist movement throughout the country. That movement should occur under the slogan of national-revolutionary struggle of the armed people against imperialist oppressors.

In that period the Comintern was increasingly actively orientating communist parties of the colonies and dependencies on struggle to set up a "popular revolutionary anti-imperialist government". It was supposed to be a predominantly anti-imperialist government, not yet being the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the working class and the peasants, since it would include also members of other classes that were taking part in the fight for national independence. The programme of

<sup>1</sup> G. Dimitrov, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

such a government was conceived as including broad social measures in the interests of the working people. In that connection, the Congress changed its stand in the question of advancing the slogan of Soviet power for the Eastern countries. That slogan was removed at the given stage of revolution in colonies and dependencies. That was a natural consequence of the shift to the tactics of anti-imperialist national front.

The change by the Comintern to a new political orientation was a strategic shift. In advancing the slogan of a united antifascist front, the Comintern was not simply pointing to fresh paths to socialist revolution, but was also defining the goal of a new stage of the revolutionary process which had already been developing for a few years. That goal consisted in establishing a state of a transitional type, in which an antifascist bloc would be in power. The Seventh Congress, by indicating a new, transitional to socialism stage of the revolutionary process, a stage which demanded a new strategy, made an outstanding contribution to Lenin's theory of revolution.

In order to make such a bold strategic shift and such an important theoretical advance, the international communist movement had to rid itself of certain unrealistic notions: the incorrect understanding of social-democracy as "the twin of fascism"; the thesis on directing the major thrust against social-democracy and national-reformism; interpretation of the united front as a political alliance which could and should be established in all circumstances only "from below" and only under communist party leadership.

All those conclusions had the most direct relevance to the East. In itself the definition of the new strategic goal—defeat of fascism and creation of an antifascist, popular-democratic state of a new type—meant setting new tasks to the Eastern communist parties as well. At the previous stage of the revolutionary process the communist movement had seen its task in winning proletarian dictatorship in the advanced capitalist states (we refer precisely to the task of the strategic stage and not to immediate task). The policy of Eastern communist parties, which were not set the task of taking power, could not, however, avoid being affected by the proletarian dictatorship policy of world communism. But now the strategic goal was to establish a state made up of a bloc of progressive forces with the working class being in the vanguard. Attaining that goal meant opening the way to further struggle for socialism.

The creative development of the Marxist-Leninist theory of revolution and renunciation of sectarian aspects had an immedi-



ate beneficial effect on the ideological-theoretical situation within Eastern communist parties. If transition to socialist revolution was denoted as a strategic task, then in a country where the working class was weak, the communist party was certainly not obliged to put forward the objective of an accelerated, forced transition of a bourgeois-democratic revolution to a socialist one. If attracting the people to the communist parties meant entering into agreements and alliances with Social-Democrats, then, consequently, such agreements were possible with national-reformists as well, and especially with national-revolutionaries. If the "bloc" state, that would be established by the victorious popular front in the West, would not only express the interests of the working class and peasants, but also of other antifascist groups of population, then that applied to the East too. If unity of the trade union movement was being recognised as important and urgent, that, of course, applied as much to the policy of Eastern communist parties. Finally, if the Comintern and its Executive were now recognising their former approach to evaluating the prospects for world revolution as over-optimistic, if the Comintern Congress was calling on Communists "to take things as they are", this appeal applied to communist parties in the East no less than to parties of the advanced capitalist countries, since over-optimistic assessments of prospects for revolution were typical of both.

In the period preceding the shift to a new political orientation, the Comintern did not always give proper rebuff to leftist tendencies in the Eastern parties. The Seventh Congress put up an effective shield to these tendencies. Henceforth Comintern policy even more actively encouraged the development of progressive, realistic tendencies in communist parties of the colonies and semi-colonies; the parties also learned a good deal from their own political experience. As a result, the new political orientation became a powerful factor facilitating a situation in which in many Eastern countries the parties were a political force to be reckoned with. The historic decisions of the Congress were particularly valuable for the parties of China, Indochina, India, the Philippines and Vietnam, i.e., primarily countries where at that time broad popular movements were developing.

Creative analysis of the experience of the world revolutionary process and further development of Lenin's teaching on revolution by the Communist International fused with those conclusions and ideas at which communist parties in the colonies

and dependencies had arrived through the difficult and glorious experience of their own struggle. As a result, the communist movement in the East received new impetus, and that is what marked the latter part of the 1930s.

It is hardly surprising that the firm condemnation of sectarian tactics by the Seventh Congress and adoption of the policy of uniting all antifascist and anti-imperialist forces should bring down streams of demagogic invective from Trotskyites, desperately trying to find support among the people with the aid of ultra-revolutionary slogans. In its manifesto the so-called Fourth International accused Comintern parties for renouncing the class struggle. Lenin's tactics of a united front to which the Comintern had returned were depicted as an attempt to deflect the working class onto the path of serving capitalism. The slanderers claimed that communist parties were supporting imperialist rule over colonial peoples and offering them their military backing for that purpose. But the ill-intentioned demagoguery of Trotskyites naturally could not prevent the people from properly assessing the historic decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress. Its theoretical, programme and tactical conclusions corresponding to the fundamental interests of the working class were received with profound approval by all socio-political forces striving for unity in the fight against fascism, war and colonial enslavement.

Despite all the salient changes which had taken place in Comintern policy in the East, it continued to develop on the basis of Lenin's propositions given at the Second Congress. One can see with particular clarity the impact of the two most general Leninist conclusions comprising the theoretical basis of Comintern strategy and tactics in Asia and Africa. The first of these related to method: the political course of Communists in the East was nothing more than part of the grandiose plan for socialist transformation of the world being carried out by the principal revolutionary forces of the time headed by the working class. The second conclusion was that Communists would successfully promote the Eastern flank of the world revolutionary process only by pursuing a policy of alliance with non proletarian anti-imperialist forces of the oppressed peoples under the strict condition of retaining and safeguarding the independence of their movement. Those conclusions were calculated for the whole epoch of socialist transformation of the world.

The theoretical conclusions and strategic propositions of the Seventh Comintern Congress underwent historical test in



the years to come and demonstrated their efficacy and vitality. The Congress resolutions focused on further enhancing the social role of the working class and its communist vanguard. By continuing and developing the policy worked out in that period, Communists won world-historical successes. That was evident in their leadership of popular-democratic revolutions, the building of socialism in several countries of Europe and Asia, and then in Latin America as well; in support for the national liberation movement that put an end to the shameful system of colonialism; in the organisation of an international movement of solidarity with peoples fending off imperialist aggression in Indochina, the Middle East and other areas of the globe; in the uniting of all revolutionary and democratic forces in the campaign for peace, democracy and social progress.

## CONCLUSION

The Comintern, by creatively developing Marxist-Leninist theory in regard to the post-October Revolution epoch, did immense work in strengthening and uniting communist parties, equipping them with Leninist ideas and thereby combining Leninism and the international revolutionary working-class movement. It was a titanic political force combating the power of capital, fascism, imperialist oppression and war. It invariably adhered to Lenin's policy of an alliance between the first country of the victorious working class, the proletariat of capitalist countries and the national liberation anti-imperialist movements. The history of the Comintern was proletarian internationalism in action. It regarded support for the liberation movement in Eastern countries and in assistance to communist parties of the oppressed nations as an aspect of world policy of the revolutionary proletariat, whose basis had been laid by Lenin.

Comintern history bears witness that knowledge of the scientific theory of social development does not in itself make communist parties close to the people, no matter how skilful their propaganda may be. The people learn politics primarily from their own experience and turn to Marxist-Leninist conclusions as they analyse that experience. In fighting for the proletariat's final objectives, Communists at the same time—and precisely for that reason—are interested in the most bold, radical and consistent resolution of tasks advanced at the presocialist stages of revolution; at each of those stages they consistently and resolutely favour the cause that is most important for the nation; they pursue a policy of uniting all classes and sections to whose interests a successful completion of the current stage of revolution objectively corresponds, doing all they can to encourage the progressive potential of



non-proletarian forces and focusing efforts on combating the most reactionary wing of the ruling classes. In order to enhance their influence within the united front of progressive socio-political forces, Communists have to act in its vanguard; recognition of the leading role of the proletariat and its party should by no means be a strict condition for accepting a particular socio-political group into the united front in which Communists participate—on the contrary, their insistent and painstaking work within the framework of the front is a necessary precondition for their guiding and determining influence on the revolutionary process. The history of the Comintern and the international communist movement generally, and in the Eastern countries in particular, has confirmed that the paramount tactical (in the widest sense of the word) principle of the Marxist-Leninist party is to work *"wherever the masses are to be found"*, to reject any form of sectarianism, strictly to maintain and safeguard the ideological and political independence of the communist movement. Only by basing themselves on that principle could Eastern Communists properly define their attitude, for example, to national-bourgeois forces and socialist-minded revolutionary democrats and to the whole complex set of problems bound up with life and struggle in the developing countries. By relying on Lenin's teaching, the Comintern created in its practical and theoretical activity values, many of which remain valid to this day.

In that connection we should mention the importance of the experience and activity of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Party of Lenin was doing all it could to help the advance of the international communist movement. Its founder had worked out the theoretical, policy, strategic and tactical principles of the Third, Communist, International, having creatively developed Marxist science as applied to the new historical circumstances. The Party of Lenin passed on its vast store of practical knowledge to the young communist parties. Its most experienced people worked in the Comintern and other international revolutionary organisations. The Party of Lenin made a huge contribution to drawing up an effective policy for the Communist International—on a worldwide scale, in the West and the East.

Far-reaching changes have occurred in the world since the Comintern ceased to exist; a world socialist system has come into being, exerting an increasingly decisive impact on the course of history; colonial empires have crumbled; the international communist movement has become the most influential

political force of the epoch. The general principles of its strategy and tactics are a summing up of the proletariat's experience of struggle for a socialist transformation of the world. The history of the Communist International set up by Lenin is a bedrock of that experience. And Communists of all lands have related and continue to relate to it.



## INDEX OF PARTIES AND ORGANISATIONS

- All-India Executive Committee of the Red Trade Union Congress—155  
All-India Trade Union Congress—145, 148, 161  
Anti-Imperialist League—122, 188, 255, 263-265  
British Communist Party—147  
Comintern—see International  
Communist Party of Algeria—263  
Communist Party of Annam (CPA), (Indochina)—165, 167, 170, 171  
Communist Party of China—125, 126, 165, 166, 194, 205-225, 227-229, 238, 247, 251, 263, 264, 269, 276-279, 284  
Communist Party of Egypt—280  
Communist Party of France—see French Communist Party  
Communist Party of Holland—61  
Communist Party of Indochina (see also Communist Party of Vietnam)—161, 169-171  
Communist Party of Indonesia—104-123, 127-129, 183, 193, 262  
— Foreign Bureau—112, 122  
Communist Party of Iran—97, 263  
Communist Party of Palestine—263, 280  
Communist Party of (the) Philippines (of the Philippine Islands)—181, 182, 191-201, 203-205, 238, 262, 279, 284  
Communist Party of South Africa—233-235  
Communist Party of (the) Soviet Union (C.P.S.U.); also: Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) / R.S.D.L.P.(B.); Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) / R.C.P.(B.)—23, 50, 51, 88-91, 97, 106, 210, 255, 273, 288  
Communist Party of Syria—263, 280  
Communist Party of Turkey—262  
Communist Party of (the) U.S.A.—159, 183, 188  
Communist Party of Vietnam (also Communist Party of Indochina)—161, 169-171  
Confederation of Farm Workers, National (NCFW)—188, 189  
Congress Socialist Party (C.S.P., India)—156, 157, 160  
Democratic Front (Indochina)—180  
"Destour" (see also: "Neo-Destour")—233  
Executive Committee of the National-Reformist Congress (India)—155  
Federation of Elected Muslims—232  
Federation of Labour of the Philippines—182  
"Fight for Vietnam"—165  
French Communist Party—161, 166, 172, 174, 177, 178, 180  
French General Confederation of Labour—178  
German Communist Party—253  
Indian Communist Party (1920)—132  
Indian Communist Party (1924)—134, 143, 147, 148, 152  
Indian Communist Party (Communist Party of India)—132, 141, 144-152, 161, 238, 262, 270, 278  
Indian National Congress (I.N.C.)—90, 126, 129-133, 137-150, 153-160, 250, 255, 278, 279  
Indian Revolutionary Association—137  
Indochina Communist Party (I.C.P.)—166, 167, 170  
Indochina Kuomintang (see also National Party of Vietnam)—162, 164, 170  
Indonesian Seamen's Union—112  
International, Second—15, 25, 31, 34, 35, 252  
International, Third, Communist—(also Comintern)—29, 31, 48, 53, 55, 56, 58, 60-62, 64, 66, 69, 72-74, 77, 79, 82, 83, 87-94, 97, 99-105, 107-110, 112-116, 118, 119, 121-127, 129, 132-134, 136-141, 143, 144, 146-151, 153, 154, 158-169, 171, 172, 174, 175, 177, 179, 181-185, 187-196, 198, 199, 201, 202, 204-207, 209-213, 216-220, 222-229, 234-249, 255, 261-265, 267, 268, 270, 273, 274, 276, 277, 280, 282-288  
—Comintern Congresses:  
—First Comintern Congress (1919)—54, 55, 252  
—Second Comintern Congress (1920)—8, 24, 25, 43, 47, 51, 55, 59-61, 63, 69, 70, 72, 74-78, 80-82, 85, 87-92, 94-97, 99-103, 110, 123, 132, 135-137, 139, 162, 172, 240-244, 246, 251, 255, 258, 259, 277, 285  
—Third Comintern Congress (1921)—92-97, 138  
—Fourth Comintern Congress (1922)—98-103, 106, 109, 138  
—Fifth Comintern Congress (1924)—162, 241-245, 259  
—Sixth Comintern Congress (1828)—151, 152, 235, 246-262  
—Seventh Comintern Congress (1935)—127, 128, 155-157, 159, 176, 177, 179, 194, 195, 200, 202, 231, 249, 262-286  
—Executive Committee of the Communist International (E.C.C.I.) (Comintern Executive)—60, 87-90, 93, 94, 98, 104, 106, 108-110, 112-129, 132, 133, 136, 139, 142, 145, 146, 148, 149-154, 162, 163, 167-169, 171, 172, 174, 176, 185, 189, 190, 193, 194, 196, 204-207, 210-213, 218, 221, 222-228, 230-233, 237, 238, 242, 245, 246, 251, 262, 264, 270, 276, 280, 281, 284  
—Fifth Plenum of the Enlarged Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) (1925)—112, 113, 115, 142, 182, 183, 244, 245  
—Sixth Plenum of the Enlarged Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) (1926)—145, 213, 214  
—Seventh Plenum of the Enlarged Comintern Executive Committee (ECCI) (1926)—216-218, 223  
—Ninth Plenum of the E.C.C.I. (1928)—225, 226  
—Thirteenth Plenum of the E.C.C.I. (1933)—152  
—Eastern Section of the Comintern Executive Committee (E.C.C.I.)—113-115, 132, 133, 142, 163, 182, 211, 268  
—Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern (ECCI)—152, 155, 167, 168, 172, 174, 176, 177, 184, 185, 233, 238, 250, 268  
—Small Bureau of the Comintern Executive (ECCI)—136, 137  
International Workers' Relief—178  
Iran National Resurgence Party—19  
Iranian People's Party (Tudeh Party)—20  
Kuomintang—126, 205-216, 218-228, 238, 242, 247, 251, 260, 261, 270  
Labour and Socialist International—247, 252, 267  
Labour Congress of the Philippine Proletariat—189  
League of Arab Schoolteachers—232  
League of Radical Congressmen Party—133  
Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party—79  
National Communist Party of India—134  
National Confederation of Farm Tenants and Labourers (Philippines); also Confederation of Farm Workers (N.C.F.W.)—181-184, 188, 189  
Nationalist Party (Philippines)—160, 181, 197  
Nationalist Party of Indonesia—122  
National Party of Vietnam; see also Indochina Kuomintang—162, 164, 171  
"Neo-Destour" (Tunisia)—229, 232



North African Star (Algeria)—229, 232  
 Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat—  
 187, 188  
 Partai Nasional Indonesia (Partindo)—  
 128  
 Party of the Working People of Viet-  
 nam; also Communist Party of  
 Indochina; (see also: Communist  
 Party of Vietnam)—169-171, 173-  
 179, 262, 270, 280, 284  
 —Foreign Bureau—176  
 Peasant International—188  
 Peoples Democratic Party of Afghani-  
 stan—23  
 "Perhimpunan Indonesia" (P. I.)—  
 115, 123  
 Philippine Labour Congress—181-186,  
 188-190  
 Philippine Labour Party—168, 182-189  
 Popular League for Liberation of the  
 Congo (PLLC)—235, 236  
 Profintern (Red International of La-

bour Unions)—122, 182, 184, 187,  
 209  
 Red Sarekat Islam (S.I.); see also:  
 Sarekat Rakjat (S.R.)—105-112  
 Revolutionary Youth League of  
 Vietnam—165-169  
 Sarekat Islam (S.I.) / Islamic Alli-  
 ance—38, 105-113, 117, 120, 121, 125,  
 127, 142, 149, 260  
 Sarekat Rakjat (S.R.)—112-115, 117, 120  
 Second International—see Internati-  
 onal, Second—15, 25, 31, 34, 35, 252  
 Social Democratic Association (Indo-  
 nesia)—105  
 Socialist Party of the Philippines—197,  
 200, 202  
 Ulem Association—232  
 Union of Communists of Indochina—  
 167  
 Wafd (Egypt)—232  
 Workers' and Peasants' Party of Ben-  
 gal—150  
 Workers' and Peasants' Party of Hindu-  
 stan—135, 142

## NAME INDEX

Abad Santes, Pedro—197, 205  
 Achaemenid—19  
 Acharya, M.P.T.—137  
 Aga-Zadeh—97  
 Adhikari, Gangadhar M.—139, 143  
 Ahmad, Muzaffar—134  
 Aliarcham—110, 111, 115, 119  
 Alimin—116, 117, 121, 122, 183  
 Allen, James—159, 197-199, 203-205  
 Amanullah—11  
 Ashleigh, Charles—135  
 Baars, Adolf—106, 107  
 Barq, Abdur Rabb—137  
 Bebel, August—34  
 Bennett—252, 253  
 Bergsma, Pieter—106, 107  
 Bernstein—35  
 Bokassa—17  
 Bonifacio, Andrés—192  
 Borkenau, Franz—60  
 Bose, Subhas Chandra—132, 134  
 Bradley, Ben—158  
 Capadocia, Guillermo—200, 203  
 Carr, Edward—60  
 Chang Fu—170  
 Chattopadhyaya—137  
 Chettiar, Stringaravelu—133-135, 144  
 Chiang Kaishek—208, 210, 213-215,  
 218, 219, 221, 223-225, 264, 276,  
 278, 279  
 Chicherin, Georgi—137  
 Codovilla, Vittorio—121  
 Cyrus—19  
 Dange, Sripat Amrit—133-136  
 Darsono—106, 107, 109, 117, 122  
 David—35  
 Dennis, Eugene—188, 194, 195

Dietzgen Senior—76  
 Dimitrov, Georgi—128, 204, 230, 231,  
 233, 267, 268, 270, 271, 273, 274,  
 275, 276, 281, 282  
 Elliot—182  
 Engels, Frederick—8, 25, 29-32, 33,  
 44, 54, 90, 161, 172  
 Evangelista, Crisanto—182, 184, 187,  
 191, 192, 203, 204, 205  
 Florin, Wilhelm—204  
 Gandhi—70, 130-133, 135-138, 144,  
 152, 155  
 Genghiz Khan—89  
 George, Harrison—184  
 Geyer, Dietrich—60  
 Gottwald, Klement—204  
 Hapsburgs—32  
 Hatta, Muhammad—123  
 Ho Chi Minh—161-167, 169, 170  
 Hu Hanmin—210-213  
 Hussain, Ghulam—134  
 Idi Amin—17  
 Jaurès, Jean—34  
 Joshi, P. C.—159  
 Kamgar, Girni—155  
 Katayama, Sen—99, 121  
 Khomeini, Ayatolla—20, 21, 22  
 Kol, Hubert van—31, 35  
 Kun, Béla—88, 267  
 Kuusinen, Otto—121, 152, 194, 204,  
 233, 250, 251, 252, 254, 255,  
 267, 268  
 Le Duan—161, 169  
 Lenin—5-16, 24-28, 31, 33-54, 55-90,  
 92-99, 106, 114, 122, 124, 126,  
 132-135, 139, 161, 172, 188, 203,  
 230, 232, 233, 240, 243-245, 251,



252, 254, 255, 262, 266, 268,  
287, 288  
Li-Li-san-228, 229  
Luhani-137  
Luxemburg, Rosa-34, 41, 48  
Malaka, Tan-113, 116, 122, 183  
Mann, Tom-97  
Manuilsky, D.Z.-121, 194, 233, 241,  
242, 267, 268, 271, 276  
Mao Zedong-228, 229, 276  
Marx, Karl-5, 8, 25, 29-32, 33, 44,  
54, 90, 161, 172, 281  
Mukherji, Abani-132, 135-138  
Musso-116, 117, 121, 122, 127, 128,  
129  
Napoleon-254  
Nasser-13  
Nehru, Jawaharlal-132, 159, 255  
Neumann, Heinz-253  
Nollau, Günther-60  
Nyerere, Julius-17  
Ora, Antonio D.-182, 184, 191, 192  
Ordzhonikidze, G. K.-87  
Palme Dutt, R.-158  
Pamuji-129  
Pavlovich, M. P. (Veltman)-88, 89  
Péri, Gabriel-178  
Pieck, Wilhelm-194, 267, 268, 276  
Pyantitsky, O. A.-267  
Quelch, Thomas-88  
Quezon, Manuel-159, 197, 198, 199,  
200, 203, 204, 205

Reed, John-88  
Riza Pahlevi, Mohammed-18, 19  
Roy, Manabendra Nath-25, 60-77,  
84, 90, 94-96, 99, 100, 132-141,  
143, 145, 146, 242, 243, 253  
Sadat-13, 17  
Sardesai, S. G.-156, 157  
Satyabhakta-134, 143, 148  
Semaun-106, 107, 112, 115, 117,  
122, 123  
Seton-Watson, Hugh-60  
Shao Lizi-213  
Smeral, Bohumir-267  
Stasova, Y. D.-87  
Sugono-119  
Sukarno-122  
Sultan-Zadeh, A.-78, 90, 96  
Sun Yat-sen-37, 38, 207  
Thang Zuolin-219  
Thorez, Maurice-180  
Tjokroaminoto, Omar Said-109, 110  
Togliatti, Palmiro-121, 208, 252,  
267, 268, 276, 277  
Trotsky-82, 83, 91, 92, 140, 180,  
239  
Tshombe-17  
Ulyanovsky, R. A.-82  
Varga, Eugen-90, 94  
Wang Junwei-219  
Wang Ming-267, 277, 278, 279  
Zhang Tailei-97

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